

LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP PATROLMAN

The Western Desert 1940–43



TIM MOREMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY RAFFAELE RUGGERI

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

TIM MOREMAN is a freelance writer and academic. For several years he lectured in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, from where he obtained his PhD. He also held an appointment as Resident Historian at the Army Staff College at Camberley. His primary interests include the British-Indian Army during the 19th and 20th centuries, counter-insurgency, and the British and Commonwealth armies during World War II. In addition to a significant number of articles and papers, Tim has written two major books: a study of the Indian Army on the North-West Frontier 1849–1947, and a book on the war in Burma and Malaya 1941–45. In recent years he has also worked for the new *Dictionary of National Biography* and the Australian War Memorial, as well as acting as a historical adviser for the BBC and Carlton Television.

RAFFAELE RUGGERI was born in Bologna where he works and lives with his wife. After studying at the Fine Arts Academy he worked in several areas of graphics and design before deciding to devote himself to illustration.

WARRIOR • 148

LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP PATROLMAN

The Western Desert 1940–43



First published in Great Britain in 2010 by Osprey Publishing
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK
44-02 23rd St, Suite 219, Long Island City, NY 11101, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

© 2010 Osprey Publishing Ltd.

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 84603 924 9

E-book ISBN: 978 1 84603 925 6

Editorial by Ilios Publishing Ltd, Oxford, UK (www.iliospublishing.com)
Cartography Map Studio, Romsey, UK
Page layout by Mark Holt
Index by Alan Thatcher
Typeset in Sabon and Myriad Pro
Originated by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Suffolk, UK
Printed in China through Worldprint Ltd

10 11 12 13 14 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Jack Valenti at the LRDG Preservation Society for some extremely useful pointers about LRDG vehicles and Matthew Broadbridge for information about the Indian Long Range Squadron. John Mussell at Token Publishing kindly gave permission to quote from Brendan O'Carroll's *The Kiwi Scorpions* (Honiton: 2008) and my thanks also to Pen & Sword for permission to quote from David Lloyd Owen's *The Long Range Desert Group 1940–45: Providence their Guide* (London: 2001) and Alastair Timpson and Andrew Gibson-Watt's *In Rommel's Backyard* (London: 2000).

ARTIST'S NOTE

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. The Publishers retain all reproduction copyright whatsoever. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Raffaele Ruggeri,
Via Indipendenza 22,
Bologna, 40121,
Italy

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM
COLLECTIONS

The photographs in this book come from the Imperial War Museum's huge collections, which cover all aspects of conflict involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the start of the twentieth century. These rich resources are available online to search, browse and buy at www.iwmcollections.org.uk. In addition to collections online, you can visit the Visitor Rooms where you can explore over 8 million photographs, thousands of hours of moving images, the largest sound archive of its kind in the world, thousands of diaries and letters written by people in wartime, and a huge reference library. To make an appointment, call (020) 7416 5320, or e-mail mail@iwm.org.uk. Imperial War Museum www.iwm.org.uk

THE WOODLAND TRUST

Osprey Publishing are supporting the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, by funding the dedication of trees.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anti-Aircraft
AFV	Armoured Fighting Vehicles
AP	Armour Piercing
AT	Anti-Tank
HQ BTE	Headquarters British Troops Egypt
CO	Commanding Officer
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
GHQ ME	General Headquarters, Middle East
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HE	High Explosive
HMG	Heavy Machine Gun
ILRS	Indian Long Range Squadron
LCP	Light Car Patrols
LMG	Light Machine Gun
LRDG	Long Range Desert Group
LRP	Long Range Patrol
MG	Machine Gun
MMG	Medium Machine Gun
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NZ	New Zealand
OC	Officer Commanding
PPA	Popski's Private Army
rpm	Rounds per minute
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
SAS	Special Air Service
SAA	Small-arms Ammunition
SMG	Sub-machine Gun
SMLE	Short Magazine Lee-Enfield
WE	War Establishment

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHRONOLOGY	6
THE CONCEPT, ROLE AND TRAINING	10
Role • Training	
RECRUITMENT	18
BELIEF AND BELONGING	20
APPEARANCE, WEAPONS AND VEHICLES	23
LIFE ON CAMPAIGN	30
EXPERIENCE IN BATTLE	42
The LRDG and 'road watch' • The raid on Barce, September 1942	
AFTERMATH	58
MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62
INDEX	64

FOR A CATALOGUE OF ALL BOOKS PUBLISHED BY OSPREY
MILITARY AND AVIATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Osprey Direct, c/o Random House Distribution Center,
400 Hahn Road, Westminster, MD 21157
Email: uscustomerservice@ospreypublishing.com

Osprey Direct, The Book Service Ltd, Distribution Centre,
Colchester Road, Frating Green, Colchester, Essex, CO7 7DW
E-mail: customerservice@ospreypublishing.com

www.ospreypublishing.com

LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP PATROLMAN

INTRODUCTION

The Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) – the brainchild of Brigadier Ralph Bagnold (1896–1990) – was the very first special force raised by the UK during the Desert War. Initially under the command of this intrepid soldier-scientist-explorer, what was initially known as the Long Range Patrol (LRP) quickly proved itself as an elite intelligence-gathering unit. While the main British and Axis armies slogged it out along the coast, small LRDG patrols ranged virtually at will across the inner deserts of Egypt, Libya and later Tunisia, exploiting the Axis' open desert flank. Mounted aboard specially adapted trucks, LRDG patrolmen routinely travelled deep behind enemy lines to reconnoitre, carry out covert surveillance of roads, airfields and installations and gather topographical intelligence. Information sent back over vast distances by skilled radio operators often played a key part in

The vast sand seas found in parts of the inner Libyan Desert consisted of range after range of dunes up to 150m in height. They were formidable obstacles to all but LRDG patrols. (HU 16566)



decision-making in Middle East Command. The LRDG also preyed upon Axis lines of communication, airfields and isolated outposts, although raiding was always very much a subsidiary role. Other tasks included ferrying agents and other units to and from their objectives behind enemy lines, as well as rescuing downed aircrew and escaped POWs. Later it struck up a close relationship with other special forces – most notably the SAS – with whom it closely cooperated.

The LRDG fully justified its status as an elite special force and despite its small size it played a key contributory role in the Allied victory in North Africa. It repeatedly performed tasks beyond the knowledge and ability of regular Commonwealth troops. It had a unique organisation, was equipped with especially adapted arms and equipment and carried out specialist training to fit it for its role. A selective recruitment policy ensured it was always composed of skilled, self-reliant and highly motivated



A carefully posed group photograph of the Yeomanry Patrol celebrating at Kufra after a successful raid deep behind enemy lines. Back row from left to right: Trooper 'Tankie' Babb (Tank Corps); Corporal Jack Harris (Somerset Yeomanry); Gunner James Patch (Royal Artillery); Sergeant Derek Hutchins (Somerset Yeomanry); Lance Corporal Arthur Cave MM (Somerset Yeomanry); Lance Corporal Brian Springford (Somerset Yeomanry); Trooper Kenneth Tinkler (Cheshire Regiment); Craftsman Alf Tighe MM (REME); Trooper Armstrong. Front row (left to right): Private Devine (Seaforths); Private John McKay (Seaforths); Trooper F. Gordon Harrison (Yorkshire Hussars); Private William Fraser (Seaforths); Trooper L. D. Coombs (Somerset Yeomanry); Trooper Robert Davies (Yeomanry); Trooper Donald Cashin (Cheshire Yeomanry). (HU 25277)

volunteers. Overall this small force provided a massive return for investment in terms of the vital information it gathered. Its raiding activities diverted Axis troops and aircraft away from the main battle and prevented incursions into Egypt and the Sudan. Its early successes inspired a direct offshoot – the Indian Long Range Squadron (ILRS) – which the LRDG helped train and which later came under its direct command in 1942/43. The LRDG undoubtedly earned the respect of its opponents, with its ability to appear out of and then disappear into the desert. Indeed, the Italians dubbed them ‘the ghost patrols’. As Brendan O’Carroll has written, the LRDG clearly lived up to its unofficial motto – ‘Not by strength, but guile’.

The LRDG’s impressive achievements were made possible only by its mastery of the vast inner deserts of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia where it lived, moved and fought. This arid, rugged and extremely inhospitable area formed its cradle and nursery, where the LRDG grew and matured. The Libyan Desert, part of the Sahara Desert, stretches over western Egypt, north-west Sudan and nearly all of Libya itself towards the border with Tunisia. It is roughly the same area in size as India, covering an area of 1,900 x 1,600km.

The Libyan Desert consists of two distinct areas. To the north lies an area of semi-desert atop the narrow coastal plateau – popularly known to British troops as the Western Desert – running along the Mediterranean littoral from El Alamein in the east to Tripoli in the west where most of the fighting took place. This area was mostly flat, open and lacked a civilian population, except in Gebel Akhdar and near the coast where some small towns and villages existed. Few regular units, however, operated farther than 80km inland due to the shortage of water, logistical constraints and the real and imagined difficulties of the broken desert terrain inland. The ‘true’, deep or inner desert where the LRDG was based, and which it used as a highway to and from its operational areas, lay farther to the south. A combination of the vast distances involved, a dearth of water and seas of towering sand dunes along its periphery meant that this huge expanse of desert was regarded as largely impassable.

The ordinary LRDG patrolman learnt by training and experience to overcome the myriad difficulties encountered when living and moving in the inner desert, where it fought a war as much against nature as against its Axis opponents, with heat, thirst and simply getting lost posing a near-constant threat to life. As Major-General David Lloyd Owen, a veteran of the Desert War and the LRDG’s commanding officer between 1943 and 1945, has written: ‘It was here that the LRDG found the disciplines and the challenges under which it grew into a unit which in its professionalism, its level of attainment in specialist skills, its internal coherence, its very high morale and its avoidance of the public eye was in my experience unique.’

CHRONOLOGY

1940

10 June

Italy declares war on the UK and France.

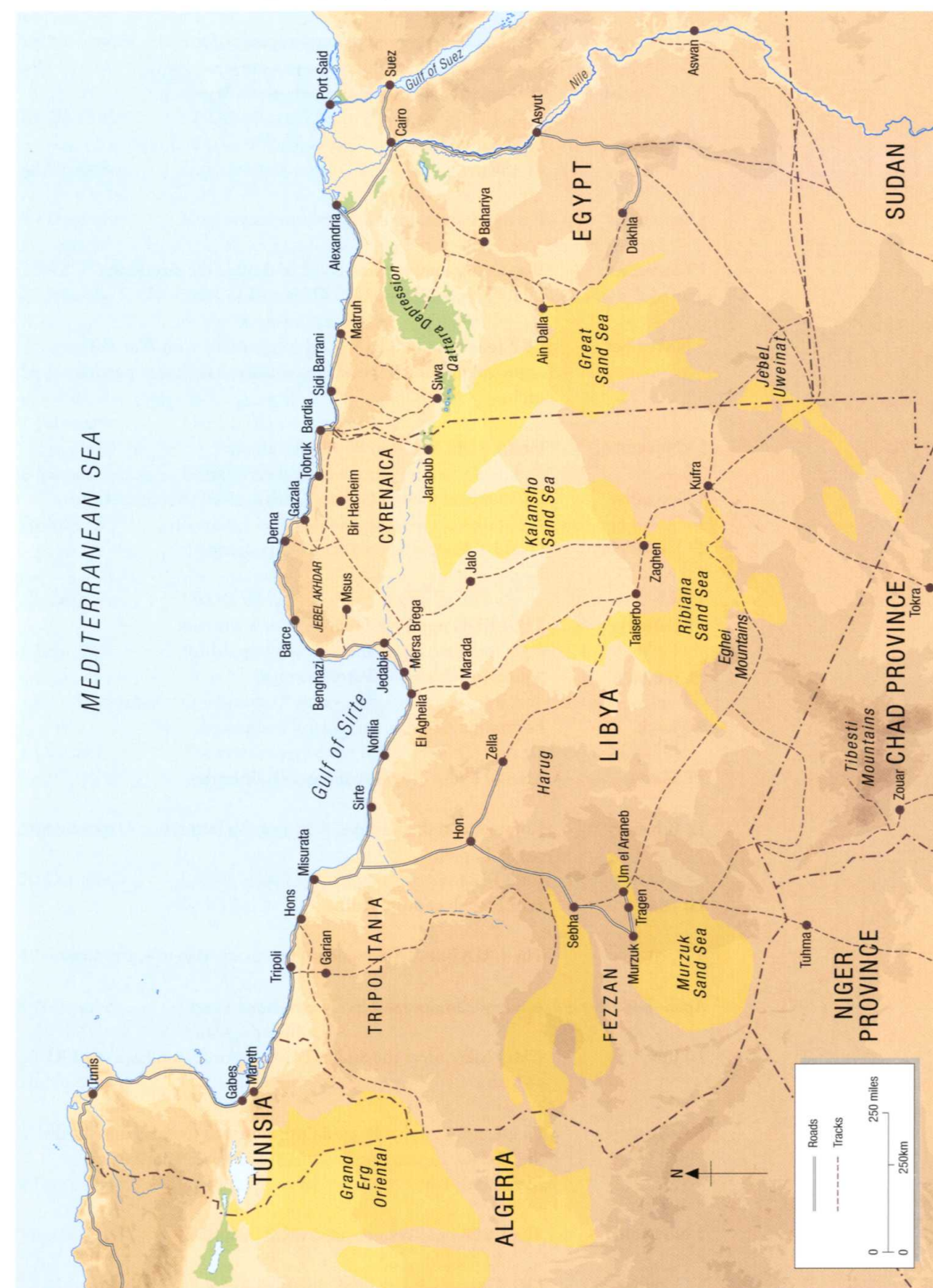
10 June

Major Ralph Bagnold proposes a desert patrol unit.

23 June

General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief Middle East, approves formation of a Long Range Patrol unit.

The North African theatre of war, 1940–43



7 July	Formation of the LRP begins.
10 July	War Office cables provisional approval for LRP.
7–19 August	LRP reconnaissance of the Jalo–Kufra road.
27 August	LRP inspected by the C-in-C Middle East and reported ready for duty.
5 September	First LRP mission undertaken in Libya.
29 September	War Office authority received to double the size of the LRP.
9 November	LRP renamed the LRDG and reorganized with War Office approval into an HQ and two squadrons of three patrols each.
23 November	First LRDG Mission: W and R Patrols.
5 December	Officers and men of G Patrol arrive at the Citadel at Cairo.
27 December	G and T Patrols begin Fezzan Expedition.
1941	
11 January	The LRDG and Free French capture Murzuk.
31 January	Southern Rhodesian Patrol formed.
9 March	Formation of Yeomanry Patrol completed.
21 March	Men of a new Royal Artillery section arrive.
12 February	Rommel and the advance guard of the Deutsches Afrika Korps reach Tripoli.
1st March	Free French capture Kufra.
9 April	The LRDG (less A Squadron) moves its base to Kufra Oasis.
April–July	A Squadron operates in Cyrenaica.
10 July	GHQ ME orders the Sudan Defence Force to relieve the LRDG at Kufra.
1 August	Lieutenant-Colonel Bagnold promoted to Colonel and leaves the LRDG. Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Prendergast assumes command.
1 November	The LRDG patrols are subdivided into two.
1 October	LRDG comes under GOC Western Army (later 8th Army).

9 November	LRDG concentrated at Siwa (with the exception of S Patrol).
18 November	All patrols, except one in reserve, are committed in support of Operation <i>Crusader</i> .
23 December	LRDG escorts SAS to targets at Sirte and Tamet.
28 December	ILRS formed.
30 December	Kufra ceases to be a base for the LRDG.
1942	
21 January	Start of Rommel's offensive through Cyrenaica, which is halted at the Gazala Line.
26 January	Jalo evacuated by the HQ LRDG.
1 February	HQ LRDG reopens at Siwa.
2 March	Beginning of 'road watch' by LRDG.
26 May	Rommel begins his ultimately victorious offensive and breaches the Gazala Line.
23–26 June	LRDG withdraws from Siwa.
1 July	British make their stand at El Alamein.
13/14 September	Operations <i>Bigamy</i> , <i>Agreement</i> , <i>Nicety</i> and <i>Caravan</i> begin.
1 October	The remainder of the ILRS (HQ and two patrols) is placed under LRDG command.
23 October	Second Battle of El Alamein begins.
30 October	LRDG ceases to be under command of 8th Army and reverts to GHQ ME.
4 November	Axis forces retreat from El Alamein.
8 November	Operation <i>Torch</i> – the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa – begins.
20 November	8th Army reaches Benghazi.
1943	
4 February	Advance units of 8th Army cross into Tunisia.
March–April	LRDG vehicles and personnel withdrawn to Egypt.
12 May	Axis forces surrender in North Africa.

THE CONCEPT, ROLE AND TRAINING

The British Army knew little about the Libyan Desert in 1939, although this had not always been the case. The challenges inherent in living, moving and fighting in the inner Libyan Desert had been encountered during World War I when the Light Car Patrols (LCPs), equipped with Model T Fords, had battled against Senussi tribesmen in 1916/17. Few of the lessons learnt about desert fighting using motor vehicles, however, were officially retained in terms of written 'doctrine'. Knowledge of the difficulties facing those operating in the inner desert and solutions to some of its problems was kept alive by a small band of intrepid British soldier-explorers led by Captain Ralph Bagnold, a Royal Signals officer, who had served in Egypt. A series of privately funded desert explorations during the 1920s and 1930s in Sinai, Palestine, Transjordan and then western Egypt taught these dedicated desert enthusiasts about the practicalities of living and travelling in the inner desert aboard suitably modified vehicles. Old lessons were relearned and valuable new experience gained in navigation, desert survival and travelling across rugged terrain.

The British Army was fortunate that Bagnold was posted to Egypt in 1939 following the intervention of the then shadowy Commander-in-Chief Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, where his knowledge and experience could be put to better effect. Those lessons learnt by Bagnold and his friends were behind the highly imaginative concept he presented in two papers submitted to higher authority, discussing the possible use of a long-range reconnaissance force operating deep in Libya. A suitably trained, equipped and specially organized unit, he believed, could exploit the mobility of desert-worthy vehicles to evade enemy pursuit and hide in the vastness of the desert, operating for extended periods without support. Indeed, such reconnaissance patrols could carry out missions lasting for weeks at a time gathering vital information, communicating with base by radio, and by striking against isolated outposts divert troops and spread alarm. On both occasions, however, these ideas were firmly rejected because of a lack of resources, scepticism about their practicability and fear of provoking the Italians.



A group of LRDG men pose for a photograph in front of their vehicles, having become the first 8th Army unit to cross the Tunisian border. At this time, LRDG patrols were being tasked by Montgomery to reconnoitre the 'going' in southern Tunisia, in case the 8th Army had to bypass the strongly held Mareth Line. (HU 16497)

The Italian declaration of war in June 1940 proved a catalyst for the acceptance of Bagnold's visionary ideas, with Egypt and the Sudan now facing a direct threat from Libya. Finding out whether the Italians were planning an offensive from Kufra towards the undefended Upper Nile and Sudan was paramount. General Sir Archibald Wavell, always open to ideas about harrying the enemy by bold and unorthodox means, quickly saw the potential of Bagnold's ideas about deep desert operations when his paper was resubmitted on 19 June. On 23 June 1940 Wavell gave Bagnold virtual carte blanche to get a new unit operational before the end of the summer.

Bagnold displayed considerable drive, determination and willpower in raising, equipping and training what became known as No. 1 Long Range Patrol Unit or more simply as the Long Range Patrol (LRP). It initially consisted of an HQ and two fighting patrols (R and T), with a third (W) to carry supplies. Each patrol was capable of operating independently or with another. The fighting patrols were initially equipped with a 15cwt pilot car and ten 30cwt Chevrolet trucks. They fielded two officers, 28 other ranks and four replacements. These unarmoured vehicles were modified for desert travel by stripping unnecessary weight (windscreens, doors and bonnets), and adding 10in.-wide sand tyres, extra springs and water condensers. Brackets and other fittings were added for sun compasses, sand channels, sand mats and other specialized equipment. The lighter pilot car carried the patrol commander, a driver and a gunner. The remaining Chevrolet 30cwt trucks were organized into four troops, with each having three vehicles. Each truck had a crew of three men: a driver, gunner and another patrolman who doubled as either a navigator, a wireless operator, an ordnance fitter, a medical orderly or a cook. In total a patrol was armed with 11 Lewis machine guns, four Boys anti-tank rifles and a single portee-mounted 37mm Bofors anti-tank gun. A patrol carried sufficient ammunition, water and rations for three weeks and enough fuel to travel 2,400km over difficult terrain. The range and endurance of patrols was progressively extended by W Patrol, which established dumps of petrol, food and water deep in the desert.



Two LRDG patrols meet in the desert. All LRGD vehicles were normally loaded to the gunnels with water, fuel, ammunition and assorted equipment required while out on patrol. (E 12390)

The Long Range Desert Group, as the LRP was re-designated in November 1940, grew quickly in size with its strength peaking in mid 1942 at 350 men organized into a Group HQ and two squadrons, each having six patrols, equipped with 110 vehicles. The strength of each fighting patrol was originally half that. The Group's HQ included a specialized signal, light repair, artillery, air, survey and heavy section. Each of the latter had a vital role in support of the fighting patrols, especially the heavy section, whose lorries supplied bases and carried out a programme of building dumps in the desert.

The ILRS was the only other major addition to the LRDG's fighting strength. Originally raised to perform a similar role in Persia-Iraq Command, it came under the LRDG's direct command in North Africa between October 1942 and April 1943. Organized, equipped and trained on the same lines as the LRDG, whose officers had assisted with its training, its four patrols were a welcome addition at a time when the LRDG was badly overstretched.

Role

The LRDG's forte was always distant reconnaissance behind Axis lines throughout Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and later Tunisia. A wide range of tasks were carried out: patrols carefully observed enemy dispositions, monitored Axis reactions to British moves, tracked the flow of reinforcements and supplies and identified units by capturing prisoners and seizing documents. Each day vital tactical information was transmitted over vast distances by LRDG radio operators to Group HQ and then onwards to General Headquarters Middle East (GHQ ME). A particular intelligence-gathering task in which the LRDG excelled was 'road watch'. From 1941 onwards small parties of patrolmen covertly observed the Via Balbia – the only metalled road running between Tripoli and Benghazi – and other routes, tallying the troops, vehicles and supplies travelling to and from the front. This information played a key role in identifying trends and evaluating other intelligence sources.

The LRDG also collected vital topographical intelligence. With Italian maps of Libya inaccurate at best and with large areas unmapped, information was badly needed about areas likely to be the scene of future large-scale operations. This 'going' reconnaissance in particular assessed the

The LRDG's survey section, under the command of Capt. Ken Lazarus, corrected inaccurate Italian maps and produced new surveys of large parts of Libya for GHQ ME. (HU 69744 LRDG Collection)



The always heavily laden vehicles used by the LRDG were capable of traversing rugged terrain that normal vehicles would have found impassable. This Chevrolet is halted amidst a rocky wadi bed. (HU24988)

suitability of the terrain for wheeled and tracked vehicles, as well as locating sites for landing grounds and the available water supply. Every LRDG patrol routinely mapped the terrain over which it travelled and this information was forwarded to GHQ ME. In 1941 a specialized survey section consisting of three vehicles, commanded by Captain Ken Lazarus, was added to the LRDG specifically for this task. Based on this information, GHQ ME produced the first detailed maps of Libya, which played a key part in staff planning and the operations of conventional units.

The LRDG regularly transported other special units – such as the Middle East Commandos, the Inter-Service Liaison Department (ISLD) or the Libyan Arab Force – and acted as pathfinders for conventional units, who were all far less well skilled or equipped for desert travel. As acknowledged experts in long-distance desert navigation the LRDG – dubbed 'Libyan Taxis Ltd' – regularly infiltrated, supplied and collected British and Arab agents deep behind enemy lines, as well as rescuing downed aircrew and escaped POWs.



An LRDG truck negotiates rough terrain near Haruz el Eswad, November–December 1942. The ability of LRDG patrols to travel over rugged desert terrain judged impassable by conventional units was a key reason for its success. (HU 24971 LRDG Collection)

The LRDG also acted as pathfinders by guiding conventional troops cross-country through desert terrain to distant objectives.

The LRDG also carried out a growing number of specifically ordered or opportunistic 'beat-ups' or raids that provided an exciting break from the less-spectacular reconnaissance work. These included hit-and-run attacks on Axis forts, supply dumps and lines of communication. Supply convoys were ambushed, bombs surreptitiously placed aboard vehicles, mines laid on tracks and telephone lines cut. Although the damage inflicted by the LRDG was small, Axis troops and aircraft had to be diverted to protect the rear areas. On occasion the LRDG mounted large-scale raids, such as those in Fezzan and Barce in September 1942.

The LRDG struck up a close partnership with other special forces, especially the newly formed L Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade, the Middle East Commandos and Popski's Private Army. Following several disastrous parachute drops, David Stirling, the OC SAS, realized in November 1941 that LRDG patrols were capable of transporting his men and dropping them with pinpoint accuracy at a given location. The LRDG henceforward provided vital communications and safely delivered SAS raiders to within walking distance of their objectives and then brought them home again. Joint offensive operations were carried out by the SAS and the LRDG, although this association exposed LRDG patrolmen to far greater risks than normal. This 'marriage' of special forces continued until the SAS acquired transport, signallers and navigators of its own.

Captain David Lloyd Owen at Ghetmir near Jalo, February 1942. (HU 25287 LRDG Collection)



Training

Those who volunteered for the LRP in July 1940 were already trained soldiers, albeit most were 'hostilities only' volunteers. Many were already also trained drivers, fitters and radio operators. Bagnold enjoyed considerable freedom when it came to training his new command in the knowledge and skills for living, moving and fighting in a hostile desert environment. The small size of the unit meant early patrolmen learnt primarily by word of mouth and example from Bagnold and his peers initially, and afterwards while 'on the job'. Indeed, the small band of New Zealand volunteers who first joined the LRP carried out only two desert training runs, under Bagnold's watchful eye, before being judged fit for operations. Later additions to the unit had more (albeit still limited) time for instruction. The Guards Patrol, for example, received only ten days' training before the Fezzan expedition began. Fortunately, Major Pat Clayton was at hand to teach such skills as driving, desert survival and using weapons during two days' practical instruction near Fayoum. Similarly, Bagnold and Captain Bill Kennedy Shaw taught S Patrol these skills. As one NCO recalled: 'We were very lucky to have Bagnold to instruct us and we learnt even more during the informal chats around the campfire in the evening.'



Sand mats repeatedly proved to be a vital means of freeing LRDG vehicles bogged down in soft sand. (E 12394)

The new LRDG patrolmen first learnt the skills needed to safely live in and move through the inner Libyan Desert. This included accustoming them to the desert and such basic survival skills as strict water conservation and constructing shelters. The ever-present danger of becoming lost in the featureless desert meant every patrolman was schooled in navigation using differing types of compasses and in plotting locations and courses on maps. Patrolmen were taught that no individual should ever move out of direct vision of his fellows given the ease of becoming lost.

The ordinary patrolman also received instruction in skills required for the unit's specialized duties. All ranks were instructed in 'car track lore' – reading tracks left behind by Axis vehicles with the aim of determining their age and the direction in which they had travelled. Instruction was given in identifying differing types of friendly and enemy aircraft, armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs), wheeled transport and troops. Patrolmen were also instructed in camouflaging their trucks, disguising tyre tracks and building hides. All ranks were taught to use and maintain the various personal and crew-served weapons mounted aboard trucks. Men were instructed in how to engage both air and ground targets and how to fire when halted and on the move.

The drivers, navigators and signallers in each LRDG Patrol, upon whom so much depended for survival and the completion of missions, unsurprisingly received the most detailed instruction. Those men designated drivers bore considerable responsibility for safely driving across rugged terrain and day-to-day maintenance. Drivers were taught how to read the terrain, know when to alter tyre pressures, how to use gears in soft sand, how to start or stop gently and how to avoid tracks used by other vehicles to prevent bogging. The art of tackling dunes was covered as well as different methods of 'unsticking' trapped vehicles. Various formations used by patrols had to be mastered. Although each patrol had a fitter, drivers also needed to be skilled at vehicle maintenance.

The fact that LRDG patrols operated in areas where distances were vast, maps unreliable at best and landmarks few and far between meant accurate desert navigation was vital. It was a highly technical subject with three



ABOVE

The Bagnold sun compass proved vital for navigating LRDG patrols during daylight hours. Mounted on the dashboard of each LRDG vehicle, it indicated the true bearing on which a vehicle was moving using the shadow cast by the sun as a guide. (HU 71822)

ABOVE RIGHT

Bill Kennedy Shaw, the LRDG's intelligence officer, uses a theodolite to fix his patrol's position at Ain Ghetmir, February 1942. This vital piece of LRDG equipment was used each night to accurately fix a patrol's location in the desert. (HU 25143)



to six months normally allowed for training. In recognition of its complexity a new army trade – Land Navigator – was eventually authorized by the War Office, with an extra shilling a day paid to qualified men.

The intricacies of desert navigation were first taught by Bill Kennedy Shaw, aided by an early New Zealand volunteer – Corporal Dick Croucher – who had earned his ticket as a mate in the Merchant Navy. Each student was taught two ways of navigating: dead reckoning and the far more complex 'astrofix' method.

The essential tools that had to be mastered for dead reckoning navigation were the sun compass and speedometer on a vehicle. Indeed, the sun compass – a device invented by the LRP and refined by Bagnold – was an essential LRDG item of equipment since getting accurate bearings with a magnetic compass was impossible inside a metal vehicle. This simple device consisted of a small circular table, divided into 360 degrees, fixed to the dashboard of a vehicle with a central upright needle projecting from the centre that cast a shadow over the graduations. By rotating the circle throughout the course of a day to correspond with the movement of the sun, the shadow indicated a true bearing.

The LRDG used astronomical observations to fix a position far more accurately. Using a theodolite to accurately fix a latitude and longitude, however, required detailed instruction, although calculating a position was considerably simplified by using RAF air almanacs. A fix on a given star would be taken by the navigator using a theodolite (if possible this was done independently by two members of each patrol) and after an accurate time check was taken and a complex formula applied to the data an exact position could be plotted on a map. This provided a fix accurate to within 1.6km of a particular location.

The signaller, drawn from either the Royal Signals or the New Zealand Divisional Cavalry, was arguably the most important individual in each patrol, given that so much depended on maintaining contact with base and transmitting accurate, reliable and timely intelligence. Signallers in the LRDG



A camouflaged wireless truck at Hatiet Erra, September 1942. These vehicles carried both a No. 11 HP set and a Marconi set. (HU 24986)

always required and received intensive training. The No. 11 HP Set used by LRDG patrols may well have been standard issue, but the skills needed to operate them deep in the desert were not. Originally designed for use over a distance of 32km, it was routinely used on patrol over distances of up to 1,600km. On occasion even further distances were achieved. All communication was normally by continuous wave (CW) transmission. A combination of the distances covered and atmospheric conditions in the desert, however, often made maintaining communications extremely difficult. All signallers underwent one to two months of specialized training, supervised by Captain Tim Heywood (LRDG Signals Officer from December 1940), before being judged fit for patrol work, and in that time learned how to pick up very weak signals from a background of atmospherics and interference. Instead of following normal practice LRDG signallers learnt French, Turkish and Egyptian commercial procedure so that an Axis radio operator listening in would confuse with a French station in Tunisia or others depending on the area a patrol was operating in. Last but by no means least, each signaller needed to be a trained and skilled technician capable of maintaining his set for weeks on end unaided.

The training of the LRDG patrolmen was put on a more formal basis when a properly constituted Group HQ was established following the unit's expansion. A series of detailed training instructions, following standard British practice, were issued by its HQ covering a wide range of tasks carried out by the LRDG as amended by practical experience. Training was always an ongoing process as new men arrived to fill gaps in the ranks and new arms and equipment were acquired. With heavy demands always being made on LRDG patrols, however, time for the 'luxury of training' was often short and was crammed in after periodic refits. Much, however, was still learnt during the course of operations, especially by individual replacements, who relied on word of mouth and the example set by their peers to master LRDG skills. As one officer put it: 'There was only one way to learn, and that was to get on with the job.'

RECRUITMENT

Bagnold quickly realized that the success or failure of the LRP depended on the quality of the available manpower. A special type of man was needed who was capable of withstanding the hardship involved in living, moving and fighting deep behind enemy lines. In Bagnold's own words: 'We had to have tough and self-reliant volunteers, but they had to be highly intelligent men too, capable of quick adaptation to entirely new ways of life, and absorbing a mass of desert lore that had taken us years to learn. Moreover, a high proportion must be technicians: fitters, gunners, wireless men, navigators, and the like.' Finding such men was a tall order since those qualified were in high demand in the Middle East in 1940.

Bagnold built up his LRP around a small experienced nucleus composed of former members of his pre-war 'desert club', who in 1940 were scattered across the Middle East. Pat Clayton and Bill Kennedy Shaw were hurriedly found and commissioned, while Teddy Mitford was transferred to the unit. All three were appointed as patrol commanders. Captain Rupert Harding-Newman, serving with the Military Mission to the Egyptian Army, also helped select suitable vehicles.

Bagnold was given a free hand by GHQ ME to find volunteers from amongst units serving in the Middle East. His first port of call was amongst those from the Dominions, believing it would be easier to find better-acclimatized, hardy and more self-reliant troops amongst them than those from the UK, as well as ones already skilled at driving and vehicle maintenance. A robust 'no' from the Australian GOC (who was under strict instructions to retain national control over all Australian troops), however, meant he turned instead to the New Zealand Division for his first recruits.

These Kiwi volunteers proved ideal. A combination of their physical toughness, individual initiative, self-reliance, knowledge of driving and vehicle maintenance (born of living an outdoor life as farmers) and willingness

G patrol, originally recruited from volunteers from the Coldstream and Scots Guards, prepares to move off on patrol from Siwa Oasis. (HU 16614)



to learn indeed made them readily adaptable to desert life. As Bill Kennedy Shaw later wrote: 'There can be no doubt whatsoever that much of the early and continued success of the LRDG was due to the speed and thoroughness with which the New Zealanders learned desert work and life.' The period of service for these men was fixed at six months, after which they would be returned. In practice the latter, however, was not strictly adhered to with some returning after only a few months and others staying with the LRDG for several years.

New Zealand members of the LRDG pause for a welcome cup of tea in the Western Desert, 27 March 1941. (E 2307)

The recruitment of the LRDG remained highly selective for the duration of the Desert War, with Bagnold's views about the essential qualities required being shared by his successor. The LRDG was extremely fortunate, as throughout the Desert War it escaped the crippling losses suffered by many regular units fighting in the Western Desert and accordingly never needed large numbers of replacements at any one time. Indeed, it retained many of its highly experienced officers, NCOs and men throughout the Desert War. Since wastage from accidents, disease and enemy action (to which promotion should be added) was also limited, men steadily trickled into the unit. The LRDG, moreover, was able to call upon manpower from an ever-widening pool. Most still came from 'parent' units, and individuals to fill specialist posts or small groups eventually came from some 50 other units in Middle East Command. Indeed, the LRDG's burgeoning reputation and the desire of 'free spirits' seeking excitement and to escape red tape, drill, guard duty, fatigues and the hidebound discipline of regular troops meant it always maintained a long waiting list. Indeed, many men willingly dropped a rank to secure a billet.

While serving in the LRDG the threat of being 'RTUed' – returned to unit – hung over the heads of all ranks. Those officers, NCOs and men who failed to prove themselves left in ignominy. This fate nearly befell David Lloyd Owen himself, a future LRDG CO, when an NCO reported badly on him after his first outing in the Libyan Desert.

The ILRS also relied on volunteers to fill its ranks. Under the command of Major Sam McCoy its four patrols were filled with British officers, Indian Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs) and other ranks, drawn from the 2nd Royal Lancers (Gardner's Horse), Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry and 18th King Edward's Own Cavalry (elements of 3rd Indian Motor Brigade), who had volunteered for special duty. It also appears likely that some officers and other ranks came from the 6th Cavalry. Like other units of the Indian Army its patrols were organized on class or ethnic lines: No. 1 Patrol consisted of Jats, No. 2 Patrol Muslims, No. 3 Patrol Rajputs and lastly No. 4 Patrol had Sikhs. Two of its British officers were 'hostilities only' but the others were pre-war regulars eager to make their mark. Since the Indian troops lacked the necessary skills, most specialist posts in the ILRS were filled by attached senior British NCOs.

BELIEF AND BELONGING

The officers, NCOs and men who served with the LRDG were always conscious that they belonged to an elite. A combination of its extremely dangerous and very specialized mission deep behind enemy lines, selective recruitment process and fiercely independent ethos set it well apart from conventional units. A deeply held belief in the LRDG's elite status had a direct concomitant of giving the unit extremely high morale and *esprit de corps* throughout its wartime existence and inspired a fierce desire to succeed at its designated tasks.

The LRDG as a whole remained throughout the Desert War a proud, happy and highly efficient organization, largely owing to the personality, skill, and foresight of its two COs. While neither possessed the charisma and showmanship of other British commanders, both Lt. Col. Ralph Bagnold and then Lt. Col. Guy Prendergast were brave, consummate professionals well versed at their chosen career and possessing detailed knowledge of living, moving and fighting in the desert. Although both were shy, reserved and quiet

A

INDIAN LONG RANGE SQUADRON (ILRS)

The Indian Long Range Squadron (ILRS), under the LRDG's direct command between October 1942 and April 1943, remains the least known and arguably most misunderstood unit that served behind enemy lines in North Africa. Originally formed with the approval of the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, following a petition by Captain Sam McCoy (a regular Indian Army cavalry officer), as part of 9th Army during the winter of 1941/42 it was intended to perform duties similar to the LRDG in the Persia-Iraq Command if Axis troops broke through from the Caucasus. Under the command of McCoy its ranks were filled with British officers and Indian volunteers drawn from the 2nd Royal Lancers (Gardner's Horse), Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry, and 18th King Edward's Own Cavalry (elements of 3rd Indian Motor Brigade). It also appears that some officers and other ranks came from the 6th Cavalry.

The ILRS performed largely the same tasks as the LRDG during the Desert War. Under the overall command of Major Sam McCoy, it patrolled deep behind enemy lines from Siwa, Kufra and then Hon. The ILRS finally came into its own early in 1943 when 8th Army approached the border with Tunisia at a time when the LRDG was badly stretched and had suffered serious casualties. This included acting as a radio link with Free French forces as they advanced from Fezzan, attacking enemy road convoys south of Tripoli and carrying out ground reconnaissance.

This illustration shows a Willys jeep (1), part of No. 4 Patrol, carrying out a reconnaissance mission near the border with Tunisia. While a British officer (2) scans the horizon, a Viceroy's Commissioned Officer (3) checks the patrol's position on a map.



in character, each had a shrewd understanding of human nature and knew how to get the best out of the men under their command. From the outset Bagnold – affectionately dubbed ‘Baggers’ – won the respect and confidence of his new command by personal example, enthusiasm, detailed knowledge of the intricate details of desert travel and his ability to answer difficult questions. Both men knew the importance of quality equipment, regarded good communications as essential and were convinced that first-class manpower was vital for the LRDG to work. A strong sense of the possible meant they guarded against the LRDG being used for tasks for which it was unfit. Both men believed in detailed, thorough and proficient prior preparation and planning that ensured success and minimum casualties.

The close-knit nature of the LRDG meant that the relationship between officers and the men at lower levels was very different from the rest of the regular British Commonwealth armies. A remote style of command based on rigid discipline and ‘bull’ common to other units was marked by its absence, with an informality based on mutual respect and understanding taking its place. In some patrols the use of first names between officers and patrolmen was common. This was partly a product of the small size of the LRDG as a unit, the small size of patrols in which men lived, moved and fought and a careful selection process that ensured that like-minded, hand-picked and dedicated men worked well together. Junior officers were always of high quality and all ranks had combat experience before joining the LRDG. The self-reliance, adaptability, initiative and good humour prized by its officers when selecting personnel helped foster morale. The combination of a shared experience of physical hardship, working closely together and living at close quarters for long periods of time and the excitement of doing a valuable (albeit extremely dangerous) job deep behind enemy lines developed a confidence and close mutual respect between officers, NCOs and men in the LRDG. As David Lloyd Owen has written: ‘Both officers and men were in the same situation, suffering the same privations, the same exhaustions, the same exhilarating thrill at the success of some operation, and the same agonising distress at some tragedy

BELOW

Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Prendergast (right), the quiet and reserved CO of the LRDG between 1941–43, and Capt. Jake Easonsmith discuss operations in the inner Libyan Desert. (HU 25158)

BELOW RIGHT

Men of Y Patrol enjoy rest and relaxation at Cleopatra’s Pool at Siwa, April 1942. A swim in these clear natural pools was extremely welcome after long periods without washing and shaving on patrol. (HU 24963)



Captain David Lloyd Owen and members of Y1 Patrol standing next to one of their vehicles, September 1942. (HU 25286)

or disappointment, the same fears to a greater or lesser degree when threatened by enemy action, the same determination to survive, the same anxieties about their families and their friends.’

Many officers, moreover, were promoted from within the ranks of the LRDG as the Desert War progressed. While out on patrol all officers, NCOs and men ‘mucked in’ – with everyone working as part of a close-knit team placing considerable trust for their own survival in the hands of their fellow patrolmen. Each man knew his own job and was willing to help others with theirs. Last but by no means least the ordinary patrolman also owed a powerful sense of loyalty to his small band of personal ‘mates’, with whom he lived, moved and fought. A desire not to let down his patrol and friends was always a powerful fillip to combat effectiveness.

The press indirectly also played a part in building and maintaining LRDG *esprit de corps*, although initially their attention was actively discouraged. Following the end of the Fezzan Expedition in February 1941, the LRDG was the subject of a series of newspaper and magazine articles and even a radio programme. The fertile imagination of war correspondents directly fostered a ‘swashbuckling’ image of LRDG patrolmen as the ‘pirates’ of the Desert War, swooping down out of the vastness of the inner desert to carry out daring ‘acts of piracy’ before disappearing as fast as they had come.

APPEARANCE, WEAPONS AND VEHICLES

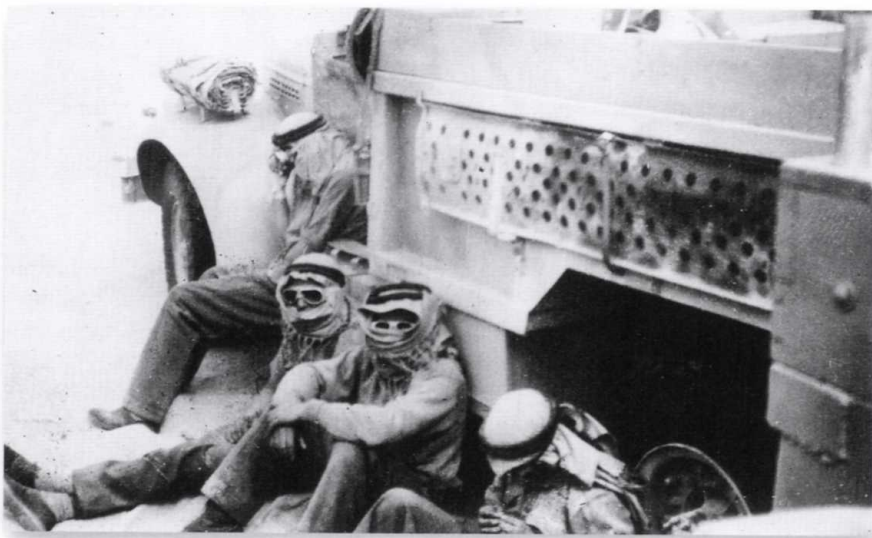
The ‘ordinary’ LRDG patrolman wore an eclectic mixture of headdress, clothing and equipment of his own choice whilst on patrol, with comfort always the key. As one officer has put it succinctly: ‘The LRDG were no sticklers for uniformity.’ Those men who volunteered for the LRDG brought with them and wore headgear, uniform, and webbing drawn from the stores of several Commonwealth countries. Initially much was of World War I vintage, including greatcoats and 1908-pattern webbing. As the Desert War progressed a limited degree of standardization was introduced, with replacement items being drawn from British stocks.

The headgear worn by the LRP patrolmen in 1940/41 included a mixture of 'lemon squeezer' felt hats, field service caps, khaki forage caps and 'Wolseley' pith helmets, with or without original insignia. Steel helmets were always carried on trucks. The distinctive mustard or sand-coloured Arab headdress or *keffiyeh*, held in place by an *agal*, was worn from 1941 onwards. It provided warmth, shade from the sun and (when wound around the face) protection from sand and dust. Its popularity waned, however, since it proved stuffy in hot weather and became easily entangled in working machinery and was usually reserved for formal parades. As one LRDG member wryly remarked: 'Very good for travelling in a dust storm and things like that, but a nuisance for working at odd jobs. Probably the reason why Arabs never work at odd jobs.' Instead, practical woollen cap comforters were widely used by patrolmen. By 1943 the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) black beret had become almost by default the official LRDG headdress.

The clothing worn by LRDG patrolmen was very mixed. During the intense summer heat patrolmen normally wore little more than khaki drill shirts and either shorts or long trousers. Some simply wore only their shorts. Over this 'uniform' was worn 37-pattern webbing as required. When away from vehicles this normally consisted of a belt, shoulder straps, ammunition pouches with a water bottle or an RTR-pattern open-top or flap-type holster attached. A small pack loaded with a small-scale map, a compass, cigarettes, emergency rations and water was always kept close to hand.

The plummeting temperature at night and during the winter months meant patrolmen wore heavier and more layers of clothing. Standard-issue Khaki Drill (KD) battledress jackets and trousers were normally worn over shirts and woollen underwear. These were supplemented with lightweight woollen pullovers. Early LRDG members wore World War I-pattern greatcoats. The extremely warm kapok-lined Tropal coat replaced these and was one of the few distinctive items of clothing issued to the LRDG. Locally made Hebron coats, made from goatskin, were also worn to keep out the chill.

Footwear worn by the LRDG patrolmen initially consisted of standard-issue hobnailed ammunition boots, over warm woollen socks, which were sometimes worn with web anklets. *Chaplis* based on those worn by tribesmen on the north-western frontier of India were issued at Bagnold's direction.



A group of LRDG patrolmen, wearing Arab headdresses tightly wound around their heads, shelter from a violent dust storm in the lee of a truck. (HU 24964 LRDG Collection)



The dust thrown up by fast-moving LRDG vehicles travelling across the desert or whipped up by a fierce wind made wearing sand goggles essential. (HU16509)

These leather sandals proved comfortable and were better suited for moving through hot, soft desert sand.

The officers, NCOs and men in the LRDG wore the same rank insignia as the rest of the British Commonwealth armies. The only other insignia worn by LRDG officers and men consisted of a cap badge, worn as a matter of choice on all types of headdress, and unit shoulder titles. These were seldom worn on campaign as a security measure.

Whilst on campaign the physical appearance of LRDG patrolmen rapidly deteriorated. With water in short supply soldiers seldom shaved or washed. By the end of most patrols nearly all men were coated with dust and sported ragged beards and shaggy haircuts. As one officer described:

A stranger meeting an LRDG patrol returning from a month's trip in Libya would have been hard put to decide to what race or army, let alone to what unit, they belonged. In winter the use of battle dress made for some uniformity, but in summer, with a month-old beard thick with sand, with a month's dirt ... skin burnt to the colour of coffee, and clad in nothing but a pair of torn shorts and chaplis [sic] a man looked like a creature from another world.

The LRDG always carried an extremely light scale of personal weapons. These included .38 revolvers, bolt-action .303 Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifles, and American .45 Thompson sub-machine guns. Types of grenade used during LRDG operations included the No. 36 'Mills Bomb', No. 69 concussion grenade and No. 77 phosphorous grenade used primarily to produce smokescreens. Depending on the individual, the highly effective No. 36 grenade could be thrown a distance of around 25m.

The LRDG employed a wide assortment of vehicle-mounted automatic and anti-tank weapons that gave each patrol far greater firepower than any unit of comparable size. While most were officially issued, others were salvaged, begged, borrowed or stolen. The exact type, number of guns and means of mounting them was very much the choice of patrol commanders. Lighter automatic weapons were normally mounted on swan-neck mounts that fitted into sockets in the chassis and on either side of the cab. Heavier-calibre weapons were normally fired from a pillar mount in the rear of each vehicle.

The LRDG frequently used captured Axis weapons. In this posed photograph the man sitting beside the driver mans an Italian Breda machine gun, while the other crewman aims a Mk I Lewis Gun. (E 12380)



The gas-operated Mk 1 Lewis Gun, a US-designed veteran of World War I, was initially used by the LRDG since it was available in large numbers and more modern weapons were in short supply. With a distinctive wide tubular cooling shroud and round pan magazines, holding either 47 or 97 rounds, it had a rate of fire of 500–600rpm. It had a tendency to jam, however, unless frequently cleaned and the ammunition pans were vulnerable to windblown sand and dust. Later some sub-units of the LRDG and the ILRS were issued with the highly effective gas-operated Bren light machine gun, which was capable of firing single rounds or full automatic bursts. Based on a Czech design, this extremely reliable weapon was accurate at ranges of up to 550m. With a magazine of 30 rounds it had a practical rate of fire of 120rpm.

The LRDG's main source of sustained heavy fire support was the venerable .303 Vickers medium machine gun. The lightweight, gas operated and air-cooled .303 Vickers K (or Vickers VGO) machine guns were also widely used, either in a single or in a custom-designed twin mount. From March 1942 the LRDG also employed .50-cal. Browning HB Air Pattern machine guns. They proved highly successful and a total of 26 Mk IV versions were issued to the unit.

The LRDG always equipped its patrols with anti-tank weapons that provided protection against enemy AFVs, as well as the extra punch needed against Italian forts. Initially the bolt-action .55-cal. Boys Anti-Tank Rifle, with a five-round magazine, was carried. A combination of its very limited effectiveness and heavy weight made it unpopular and it was eventually replaced by additional machine guns. The most effective anti-tank weapon initially used was a 37mm Bofors anti-tank gun mounted on a turntable on the back of a single truck in each patrol. A combination of its bulkiness and heavy weight, however, meant they were later replaced by the highly versatile 20mm Breda 20mm/65mm modello 35 anti-tank/anti-aircraft guns, captured from the Italians.

The 37mm Bofors 37mm anti-tank gun, mounted portee on the back of a Chevrolet 30cwt, provided LRDG patrols with a source of heavy fire support during the early part of the Desert War. It was unpopular with LRDG patrolmen, however, owing to its heavy weight. (E 2301)



The LRDG patrolman was seldom ever far from his vehicle, on which his life largely depended whilst operating deep in the Libyan Desert. None were armoured since the extra weight would drastically reduce the range of patrols. Those vehicles used by LRDG in North Africa can be broadly divided into three types: pilot cars, patrol trucks and other more specialized load-carrying vehicles used by the heavy section. All underwent considerable modification at base workshops and by LRDG fitters to make them 'desert-worthy'. A range of more specialized vehicles were also employed.

The Ford 01 V8 was initially employed as a pilot car, with one in each patrol and several at HQ, after four Chevrolet 15cwt originally issued were found too light for desert work. Although these Fords performed remarkably well in rugged terrain, their V8 engines were easily damaged by penetrating sand. By the end of the year, nearly all the engines had worn out and the trucks had to be replaced – initially by a small number of short-wheel based 8cwt Ford WT and PU trucks. The 15cwt Chevrolet 1311X3 truck – a smaller variant of the 1533 – replaced the unsatisfactory Ford WT and PU trucks. A combination of extra low-ratio gears and a six-cylinder engine that produced lower petrol consumption made them ideal for work in the desert.

The first Willys MB 5cwt jeep used by the LRDG as a pilot car had initially been abandoned by the SAS. This salvaged vehicle proved far faster and lighter than its predecessors and in July 1942 six were issued as pilot cars. Further vehicles later replaced the 15cwt Chevrolets and were prized additions to the LRDG given their ruggedness, reliability and superior cross-country performance.

Bagnold initially selected the left-hand-drive 30cwt Chevrolet WB commercial truck, bought from a local General Motors dealer or the Egyptian Army, for use by the LRP as a standard patrol truck since nothing else in British service in 1940 was suitable. Eventually, 33 of these two-wheel drive trucks were employed after having their cabs removed and being equipped with large sand tyres.

The heavy wear and tear entailed during early LRP operations in the Fezzan area, however, meant that the 30cwt Chevrolet quickly needed

Two fully loaded LRDG Chevrolet 30cwt trucks, 25 May 1942. (E 12353)



replacing. The Canadian 1533X2 4x2 30cwt Chevrolet truck was the mainstay of the LRDG fleet from March 1942 onwards. With an open cab, full-width screen and steel ammunition body it was better suited to desert work than earlier vehicles. This rugged, sturdy and reliable truck proved highly resilient to wear and tear and the constant hard work the LRDG demanded of them in the Libyan Desert.

The heavy section was initially equipped with 6-ton Ford and Marmon Herrington 6x6 heavy trucks. These were replaced by four 10-ton 6x4 Whites that were then superseded by four Mack MR9s. They were later joined by 20 Ford F60 CMP trucks.

These assorted LRDG vehicles shared common characteristics in terms of appearance. While on patrol LRDG vehicles were normally loaded up to the gunnels, with over 2½ tons of water, fuel, arms and ammunition. On occasion



A column of Chevrolet 30cwt trucks move of out into the desert, 25 May 1942. These sturdy, reliable and well-built vehicles formed the mainstay of the LRDG from early 1942 onwards. (E 12376)

B LRDG WEAPONS

The LRDG always enjoyed considerable freedom in choosing the types of personal and vehicle-mounted weapons it employed during the Desert War. Members of LRDG patrols largely carried standard British small arms: the .38 Enfield or Webley service revolvers (1), the tried-and-tested .303 Lee-Enfield Rifle (2) and the M1928 Thompson SMG (3). Unlike other Commonwealth units, the critical shortage of modern Bren light machine guns in 1940 meant patrols were issued initially with World War I-vintage Mk 1 Lewis light machine guns (4) capable of being fired from vehicles or from a bipod when dismounted. Although some Bren guns were used by LRDG patrols as the desert war progressed, only the ILRS was completely equipped with them. Indirect fire support was provided by 2in. mortars (5), along with some EY grenade-launching .303 SMLE rifles (6) that could fire Mills hand grenades (7).

The vehicle-mounted weapons used by the LRDG gave each patrol far greater firepower than other units of its size. A wide variety of weapons were employed by the LRDG during the desert war, including a mix of .303 Vickers medium machine guns (8), .5 Vickers medium machine guns (9) and later the .303 Browning and .5 Browning HB Air Pattern machine guns. The .303 Vickers Gas Operated or Vickers K (10), either in a single or double mount, originally salvaged from downed aircraft was widely used as it was capable of enormous volumes of automatic fire. It was not unusual for captured Axis machine guns, moreover, to be employed by the LRDG on operations. Several types of anti-tank weapon were also employed. The .55 Boys anti-tank rifle (11) was initially used by the LRDG, although its dubious effectiveness against anything better armoured than an armoured car meant that it was quickly abandoned. Each patrol initially had a single Bofors 37mm anti-tank gun fitted on the back of one truck, which was capable of destroying enemy light tanks and armoured cars and could damage forts. These were later replaced by highly effective captured Italian 20mm dual-purpose Breda guns, which were effective against both ground targets and Axis aircraft.



A group of LRDG patrolmen inspect newly issued Chevrolet 30cwt trucks at Cairo in May 1942. Extensive modifications were required to fit these vehicles for service deep in the desert. (E 12343)



far more was carried. The choice of camouflage was very much left to patrol commanders and considerable variations existed based on the availability of paint and personal theories about what worked best. Most vehicles had tactical markings and in some patrols vehicles bore individual names. The harsh conditions in the desert quickly weathered these vehicles, however, and most operated covered in a thick layer of dust.

LIFE ON CAMPAIGN

The life of an LRDG patrolman was extremely hard, normally characterized by long, gruelling journeys spent aboard a jolting lorry sitting amidst clouds of choking dust, with patrols travelling vast distances across the Libyan Desert. The war the LRDG fought was at times lonely, boring, and monotonous, with vast distances and difficult terrain separating patrols from outside support. On reconnaissance missions, for example, routine seldom differed for four days out of five. Throughout a patrol the threat of an encounter with Axis forces hung permanently over all ranks. For many LRDG members though, combat was quite rare with much time simply spent moving to and from patrol areas.

The vast, unmapped and hostile inner Libyan Desert formed the backdrop to everyday life. Whilst training familiarized patrolmen with the desert, a combination of its sheer immensity, eerie silence and the sense of loneliness and isolation it often instilled meant some men found it both oppressive and disorientating. For the majority the unsurpassed beauty of the clean and empty inner Libyan Desert, however, held great attraction and captivated many, especially at sunrise and sunset. Many found the panorama of twinkling stars stretching from horizon to horizon each night mesmerizing.

The unforgiving desert always posed threats to the unwary. The intense dry heat generated by the desert sun dominated everyday existence except during the cooler winter months. With little escape from the sun and the glare reflected from the sand, life was extremely unpleasant during daylight hours, with temperatures in the shade rising steadily towards 54 degrees celcius during the summer at midday. Heatstroke was a constant danger and until men developed deep tans sunburn was frequent. Thirst was a near-constant companion for patrolmen with the amount of water aboard each vehicle



strictly limited. Along with dehydration, heatstroke was a permanent risk. A combination of the heat and an inability to wash meant desert sores were suffered frequently, with these irritating and painful ulcers sometimes penetrating as deep as the bone. At night, temperatures plummeted, requiring patrolmen to don layers of clothing to remain warm.

The sand and dust storms that blew up in minutes out of nowhere were an unpleasant feature of desert life. In particular, the debilitating effect of the hot sand-laden Libyan Desert wind or *qibli* blowing northwards out of the deep desert or the similar *khamisin* wind in Egypt was keenly felt. As Bill Kennedy Shaw described the former: 'You don't merely feel hot, you don't merely feel tired, you feel as if every bit of energy had left you, as if your brain was thrusting its way through the top of your head and you want to lie in a stupor till the accursed sun has gone down.' Normal sandstorms, however, were fairly harmless, although they caused patrolmen to wear protective goggles and scarves, caused vehicles to halt or slow down and made navigation difficult.

The patrolman also had to guard against snakes, scorpions and insect life especially when he crawled into sleeping bags or got dressed. Extremely painful scorpion stings incapacitated victims for up to 36 hours. In some parts of the desert malaria-bearing mosquitoes caused casualties. Flies abounded in areas that had been the scene of fighting or home to the local Arab population.

An LRDG patrol departs into the immensity of the desert wastes at the beginning of a patrol. The appearance of LRDG patrolmen rapidly deteriorated, since washing and shaving were impossible because of strict water rationing. (HU 16490)



An LRDG patrol moves through rocky terrain on its way back to base at Kufra. Most LRDG patrolmen found the sheer beauty of the desert where they lived, moved and fought entrancing. (E 12384)

The cumulative effect of alternating extremes of heat and cold, shortages of water, fatigue and the general strain of everyday life were physically and mentally wearing and caused a particular LRDG disease – desert weariness or *cafard*. It was not fatal, however, with the afflicted cured by shade, rest and copious quantities of water to drink.

The average day for an LRDG soldier on patrol always began early to exploit the coolest daylight hours. The cook rose first and over an open fire boiled water for tea and prepared a hot breakfast. A pint of piping hot tea – using the first of the six pints of water allowed each day for all purposes – when ready would be carefully measured out into tin mugs closely supervised by the second-in-command or a senior NCO. The cook bore much responsibility for transforming the pre-packed daily rations into three appetizing meals. Fortunately the privations of desert life were such that the LRDG always enjoyed an extremely generous ration scale intended to overcome the



An LRDG patrol eats breakfast beside a vehicle, May 1942. The LRDG enjoyed an extremely generous scale of rations throughout the Desert War given the privations entailed by extended periods of life on patrol. (E 12406)



WACO AIRCRAFT

The vast distances covered by LRDG patrols and the extremely remote location of its forward base at Kufra caused serious command-and-control problems for its CO by early 1941. Since the RAF was unwilling or unable to provide suitable liaison aircraft, two WACO aircraft (built by the Western Aircraft Corporation of Ohio) were privately purchased by the LRDG, using its own funds, from a wealthy Egyptian businessman. These aircraft – dubbed affectionately Big WACO (AX 695) and Little WACO (AX 697) because of their different sizes – henceforward formed the LRDG's private air force and were flown and navigated, until others could be trained, by Lt. Col. Guy Prendergast and Sergeant (later Captain) Trevor Barker (a New Zealander), who both possessed private flying licences. Major overhauls of this 'private air force' were carried out in Cairo by Misr Airways. Despite the RAF's strenuous opposition, these suitably modified and camouflaged biplanes proved invaluable for liaison work, evacuating casualties and dropping mail, supplies and spare parts. Flying in the inner Libyan Desert, however, was extremely hazardous. Both aircraft were slow (with speeds of 225km/h and 185km/h respectively), lacked radios and initially suitable navigational equipment and bore more than a passing resemblance to Italian CR42 fighters. The dangers of ditching in the vast desert were such that both aircraft normally flew together at all times and dumps of food, fuel and water were located every 24km along well-travelled routes. This illustration depicts Little WACO (AX 697) (1) taxiing to a halt near a Chevrolet 1533X2 LRDG truck (2) to pick up a sick patrolman (3) for evacuation to a base hospital in Egypt.



debilitating effects of life in the desert. A typical breakfast, for example, consisted of porridge, fried tinned bacon and biscuits covered with margarine or jam. Other options included bacon and oatmeal cakes or bacon with oatmeal chapatis. When they were finished, tea dregs or drifts of soft sand were used to scour plates clean.

The departure of a patrol was delayed until the sun had risen at least 20 degrees or more above the horizon, which was sufficient to throw a sharp shadow on a sun-compass dial. Each crew member carefully packed any stores used overnight. Last-minute checks of fuel, oil and other consumables were carried out on each vehicle. The patrol signaller normally reported in to Group HQ at a pre-arranged time. Before departure patrolmen would be carefully briefed on the proposed direction of travel for the day ahead and on a series of agreed rendezvous if the patrol became separated. When operating near the coast all traces of the bivouac area would be carefully removed.

The lighter and faster pilot car, carrying the patrol commander, normally ranged ahead of the other trucks searching out easier routes or vantage points for observing the terrain ahead. If the enemy was sighted, a route change was required, a change in formation was needed or a sudden halt was necessary it was indicated using flags or hand signals.

The remainder of the HQ troop normally travelled not far behind the pilot car, leading the main body of the patrol. Sitting beside his driver, the patrol navigator in another vehicle was always busily employed maintaining the patrol's designated course using 'dead reckoning'. As Bill Kennedy Shaw has described: 'Sitting all day beside the driver in the navigating car, with one eye on the sun-compass, the other on the speedometer and the third on his watch he would record the course and the distance run, seizing his chance between the joltings of the truck to write down each bearing and mileage.' The radio truck normally travelled in close attendance, although its No. 11 HP set could not be used until it was stationary. The main body of a patrol – during the early years of the LRDP made up of three troops each of three trucks – followed behind, normally dispersed over as wide an area as the terrain allowed. The fitter's truck, heavily loaded with tools and spare parts, always travelled in the rear troop. Mechanical failure brought about by the heavy wear and tear on vehicles in the desert was common. If a vehicle halted because of a breakdown or a blown tyre the fitter's truck remained with



Members of Y Patrol rest near a Willys jeep following the Hon raid. These rugged and highly manoeuvrable vehicles were used as pilot cars by the LRDG during the last phases of the war in the desert. (HU 25080 LRDG Collection)

it while the remainder of the patrol moved on. The second-in-command brought up the rear of each patrol, carefully keeping an eye open for vehicles in difficulty or any signs of pursuit.

The formation in which a patrol moved depended in large part on the 'going' and the level of anticipated threat. The greatest potential danger facing a moving LRDG patrol was always being chanced upon by patrolling enemy aircraft. It was a relatively rare occurrence, however, given the vastness of the desert and the ability of LRDG to travel without being confined to recognized tracks except when operating close to the front line, near a regularly used air route or an Axis line of communication. The likelihood of being spotted and then being subjected to bombing and strafing runs, however, was mitigated as far as possible by each patrol always travelling in an open and irregular 'air formation' across open terrain. This involved its HQ and the three fighting troops spreading out over a wide front, with a considerable gap intervening between each troop and also each vehicle.

The danger posed by marauding Axis aircraft was ever-present, however, especially since LRDG patrols normally threw up a vast plume of dust. A single crewman on each vehicle, acting as an air sentry, constantly scanned for approaching aircraft. If one was spotted or heard, the patrol commander was immediately alerted by whistle blasts, toots on the horn or flag signals. A series of pre-arranged drills would be implemented. Only if it was certain that a patrol had been sighted and an attack was imminent would a patrol halt, with trucks separated by at least by 100m, or slow down to reduce dust with vehicles using any undulations in the ground, shadows cast by rock walls or dunes and boulders for cover. Experience showed that a halted, widely dispersed and camouflaged LRDG patrol was extremely difficult to spot from the air. Indeed, patrols often escaped detection even when directly overflown.

An LRDG patrol normally had two responses if spotted by hostile aircraft. Bluff often proved highly effective. With Axis forces employing large numbers of captured British vehicles, patrolmen were adept at disguising their vehicles using fabricated German or Italian identification panels and waving jauntily at enemy pilots as if nothing untoward had happened. The nondescript clothing worn and captured headgear added to the illusion. If all else failed a patrol scattered over a wide area as soon as an aircraft began its strafing and bombing run, with vehicles moving off at speed in all directions and halting widely spaced apart in any cover available. Only a single vehicle could be attacked at a time by a fast-moving aircraft. This vehicle would spoil the aircraft's attack run by moving off at speed at the last possible moment upwind at right-angles to the line of movement of the aircraft as it made its run. Meanwhile, any other vehicles in range engaged it with automatic fire. The quick reactions of drivers and speed and mobility of vehicles made it difficult for aircraft to hit them. On occasion a patrol's concentrated firepower, moreover, convinced pilots of the wisdom of departing.

The speed and distance covered by an LRDG patrol each day depended on the type of 'going' over which it travelled. Over areas of hard sand and gravel *serrir* LRDG trucks were capable of up to 65–80km an hour with up to 320km a day possible. The speed at which an LRDG patrol moved across sand seas



A camouflaged LRDG truck at Landing Ground 125, September 1942. The LRDG were highly skilful at disguising their vehicles from patrolling Axis aircraft. (HU 24967)



An LRDG Chevrolet 30cwt truck is reloaded after a tyre change, 25 May 1942. Mechanical breakdowns and flat tyres were a frequent feature of life while out on patrol given the heavy wear and tear imposed on vehicles operating in the desert. (E 12357)

was in contrast far, far slower. The parallel lines of steep and often 90m-high dunes, normally running north to south, presented formidable obstacles, as well as posing deadly hazards to the unwary. As Michael Chrichton-Stuart described: 'The smooth rollers were called "whaleback" dunes. Where they rose to break into a sharp, twisting crest they were impassable. "Razorbacks" were the danger, presenting an innocent front which dropped like a cliff on the far side.' A special technique was developed to cross them. As Bagnold later recalled: 'To get a heavy truck up 200 or 300ft of soft sand at a slope of one in three you have to charge it very fast. But it takes a lot of

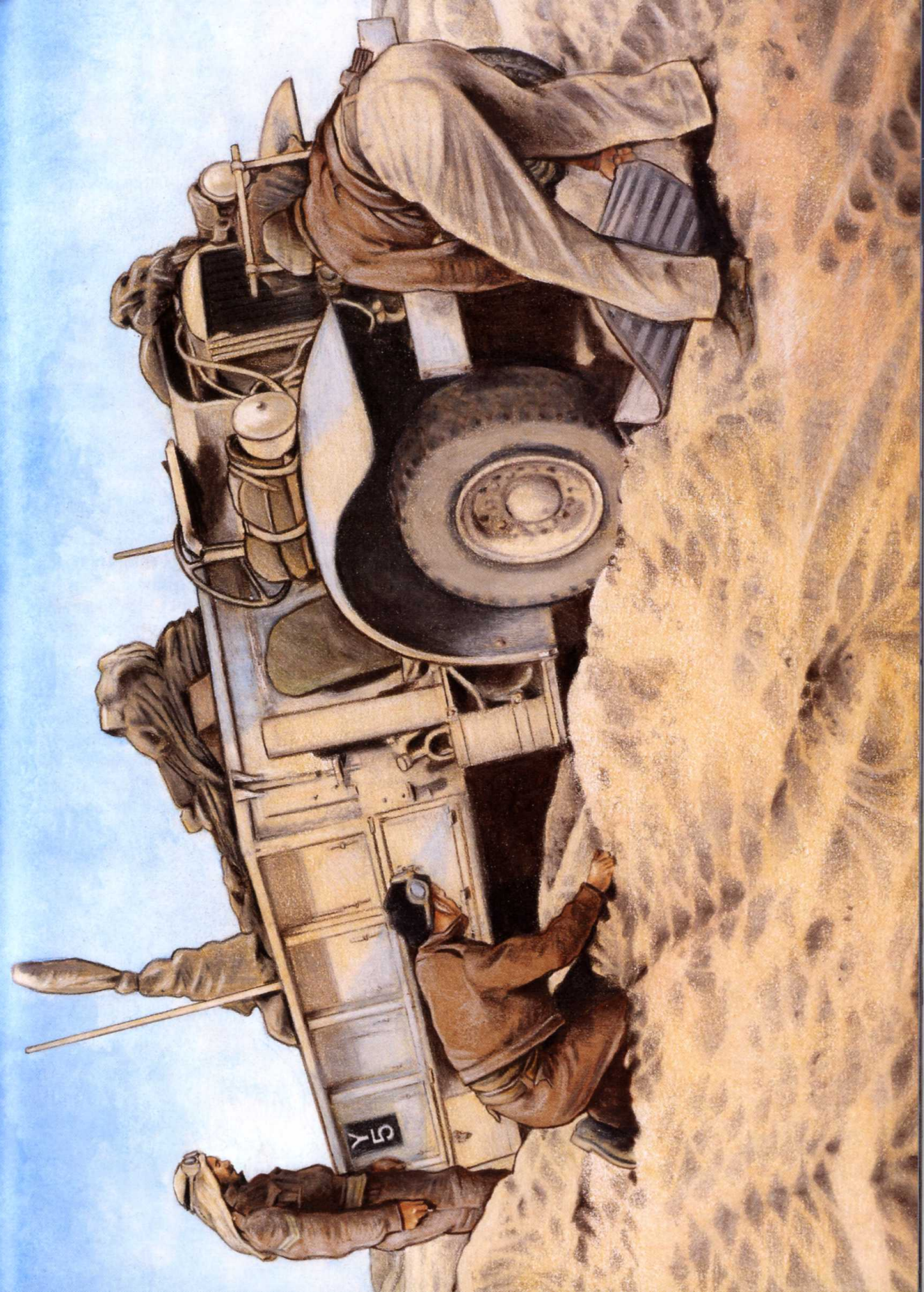
confidence to charge at full speed into what looks like a vertical wall of dazzling yellow.' A well-driven fast-moving truck, with desert tyres partially deflated to improve traction, normally had little difficulty in reaching the top of a dune. It would then stop and its crew carefully select a route across the intervening trough and a good place to charge up the next dune.

The danger of heavily laden LRDG vehicles getting trapped in the embrace of soft sand was ever present. It was a predicament, however, that by dint of training and experience LRDG patrolmen were always well prepared. A first step was always to identify a patch of nearby hard ground capable of supporting a heavily laden truck. A vehicle was 'unstuck' using tried and tested methods: partially deflating sand tires to improve traction, digging troughs between the front and rear wheels into which a 1.8m perforated steel sand channel was laid with its rearmost ends almost underneath the rear tyre and laying a canvas and slatted wood sand mat in front of each of the front wheels. A driver would carefully release the clutch and the car would move forwards using the sand channels and mats for traction. By the time the rear tyres reached the end of the channels

D FREEING A BOGGED-DOWN TRUCK

LRDG patrols travelled vast distances across the inner Libyan Desert carrying out reconnaissance missions, surveillance work, taxiing other units, and carrying out raids between 1940 and 1943. The 'going' in large parts of the inner desert often proved a greater enemy than Axis forces or the climate by restricting progress to particular areas, causing serious delays or often badly damaging vehicles. A major task for LRDG officers and highly skilled drivers was carefully spying out the terrain ahead to find routes passable to heavily loaded vehicles. Despite their best efforts to spot areas of bad going, frequent halts were often required to free vehicles trapped in soft sand or mud or hung up on rocks. Damage caused by such incidents frequently required lengthy halts, moreover, so that a REME fitter, part of each patrol, and drivers could do running repairs. Halts caused by bad going were an extremely common feature of desert travel, with many often required during the course of a single day to extricate vehicles despite the efforts of patrol vehicles to find a practicable route. Fortunately specialist equipment had been devised by Bagnold and his peers during pre-war desert explorations to assist in extricating vehicles.

This illustration shows the crew of a badly bogged-down Ford F30 struggling to free the vehicle from the sand's embrace. Freeing a vehicle from the desert sand was often a very hot, time-consuming, arduous and generally unpleasant process as patrolmen dug away sand in front of each tyre, laid sand channels in front of the rear wheels and laid sand mats in front of the front wheels to give greater purchase when the truck was restarted and the engine gunned into life. Quite often the entire contents of a heavily laden vehicle had to be unloaded and piled to one side by the unfortunate hot, sweating and struggling crew.



it normally had enough speed and momentum to carry it forward hopefully until it reached firm ground. A good push by hot, sweating and increasingly exhausted crew members was also normally essential to provide further momentum. If badly bogged the entire cargo had to be unloaded and then reloaded once a truck was free. 'Unsticking' was always backbreaking and exhausting work, especially on hot days when the steel channels would be almost too hot to handle. This process often had to be repeated again and again. As one soldier recalled: 'Occasionally in particularly bad going could we look back a couple of miles at suppertime and see the ration tins at the spot where we had breakfast before setting out in the morning!'

The progress of an LRDG patrol halted when the sun neared its zenith, as the short shadow it cast on the sun compass made accurate navigation impossible. Driving became difficult, moreover, since the absence of shadows meant undulations in the ground or patches of soft sand were difficult to spot. The vehicles would halt dispersed as far apart as possible, and patrolmen sheltered from the burning sun and glare under a vehicle. The majority of patrolmen would lie as still as possible to conserve energy or else talked quietly. Lunch was eaten cold and normally consisted of biscuits spread with various types of spread, cheese, oatmeal cake or oatmeal and date biscuits. A further pint of water was issued to each man, which was slowly sipped to replace water lost by sweating. Although not always possible, the wireless operator normally listened in for signals from LRDG HQ at a scheduled time.

The patrol resumed travel in the mid-afternoon as soon as a sun compass could be used again, and as the temperature slowly dropped life once again became bearable. An LRDG patrol normally travelled on for as long as light remained to maximize the distance it covered each day.

The LRDG followed an established routine for making camp each night. A suitable site was carefully selected by a patrol commander towards sunset, looking for low ground that shielded fires and lights from view, provided a camouflage background, offered easy concealment of tracks and provided defence against a ground attack. Ideally a drift of sand provided material for cleaning cooking utensils, to 'wash' with and a soft bed at night. The wireless truck formed a central hub around which the other vehicles halted, with the pilot car and on the other side and the cook's truck parked nearby.



Two LRDG patrolmen lay sand mats in front of an LRDG Chevrolet 30cwt truck crossing an area of soft sand, 25 May 1942. Along with steel sand channels these were essential items of LRDG equipment and were used repeatedly on patrol to 'unstick' bogged down vehicles. (E 12396)



The limited shade underneath LRDG vehicles often provided the only escape from the burning desert sun at midday halts. This stop was essential since the shadow cast by the sand compass was too short to provide an accurate reading needed for desert navigation. (HU 71344)

The remaining vehicles would take up a position in a rough circle with trucks facing out in different directions in case a quick getaway was needed.

The initial halt was followed by a period of frenetic activity as patrol members carried out their pre-assigned duties. If fresh water was available, however, the first priority was always refilling receptacles in case a hasty departure was made. The cook immediately lit an open fire and 'brewed up'. The luxury of a blazing campfire for warmth each night, using surplus petrol-soaked wooden packing cases as fuel, was something LRDG patrols frequently enjoyed when operating deep in the desert. Alternatively a three-ring Primus stove or a smaller fire inside a four-gallon tin was used, into which two round two-gallon pots were lowered to cook food. Within 15 minutes each man had a refreshing mug of tea using the final pint of water allowed to each man per day. The evening ration of a tot of strong service rum, issued at the same time as the tea, was a highlight of the day for many patrolmen and an LRDG custom. Some men drank it in their tea while others had it neat. The Rhodesian patrol developed their own cocktail, rum mixed with Rose's Lime Juice, which was drunk either as a 'sundowner' or as an 'anti-qibli pick-me-up'. This custom was later adopted by other patrols. Following this welcome refreshment, the cook immediately prepared a hot supper, using as little water as possible, while other patrol members returned to their duties.

The care and maintenance of vehicles always occupied much time, with vehicle commanders having responsibility for keeping them desert-worthy. Drivers refilled tanks, checked the mileage of their charges, adjusted tyre pressures and checked petrol and oil consumption. Loads would also be carefully readjusted taking account of the amount of fuel, oil and rations consumed each day. Fitters assisted with any maintenance required. Gunners carefully cleaned all weapons of the sand and grit thrown up during a long day's drive, as well as checking the interior fittings of their truck.

The second-in-command of each patrol, who acted as a patrol quartermaster, carefully took stock each day of the remaining fuel, oil and

supplies as reported by truck commanders, as well as overseeing vehicle maintenance as transport officer. Based on this daily check the patrol commander was informed how much farther a patrol could travel and for how many more days. Each evening (or after breakfast the next day depending on the patrol) a further two pints of water, for sipping next day, were measured out to each man again under close supervision.

The signaller manning the WT truck was always extremely busy, initially erecting the bulky Wyndham aerals. Messages to Group HQ had to be carefully enciphered before transmission, which itself often took considerable time owing to atmospheric effects.

The senior patrol navigator would also immediately complete his dead reckoning plot on the map. This would be checked against the readings taken independently by a second patrol navigator. The senior navigator then used a theodolite to take shots of two stars at an exact time, with a 'booker' standing beside him carefully noting down the details, before using his dead reckoning, the angle of the stars and aircraft navigation tables to plot the position of the patrol in the desert. This would be scrupulously checked by the second navigator and finally an exact position for the bivouac agreed.

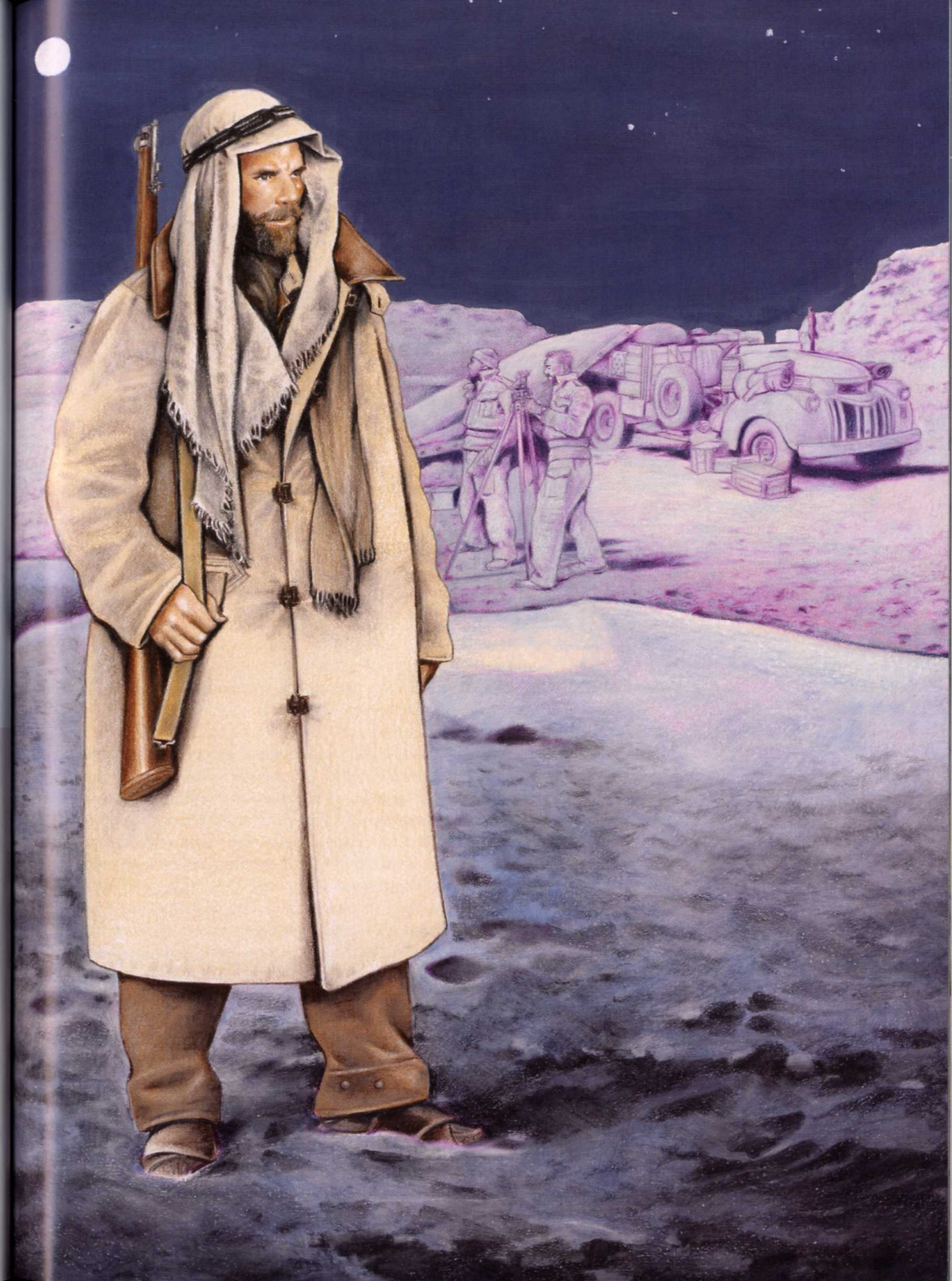
Meanwhile, the remaining patrol members – apart from those on sentry duty – prepared beds for the night. Trucks would normally park side-on to the prevailing wind and in their lee three shallow coffin-like trenches were dug into the sand. A tarpaulin would be stretched out from the side of the vehicle and pinned to the ground using spare tyres to form both a wind-shelter and groundsheet. On top of this bedding rolls were laid out, providing sufficient warmth to counter the plunging temperature.

The patrol would eat the evening meal, normally a stew with or without curry powder, after completing their work. Occasionally official rations were supplemented by captured food or by what could be foraged from the

E

UNIFORM

The ordinary LRDG patrolman enjoyed great freedom when it came to what 'uniform' was worn whilst on patrol. With LRDG members coming from over 50 different units and several different British Commonwealth countries, a wide variety of headgear, uniform and equipment was the norm. Indeed, the only restrictions were those placed on them by individual patrol commanders keen to maintain the individual identity of his patrol. Much depended on the season and time of day when it came to what was worn, with temperatures normally plunging after nightfall. During the summer months many wore little more than a hat to keep off the sun, a pair of standard-issue KD shorts and leather *chapolis* in an attempt to remain cool in the blistering heat of the day. The glare off the desert sand was so intense, moreover, that goggles were normally worn. During the winter, conditions were normally much cooler during daylight hours with warmer headgear and heavier clothing the norm. At night men bundled up against the rising chill. This illustration shows a bearded LRDG patrolman on sentry duty in the early evening wearing a mixture of clothing to keep warm. A thick Tropal coat is worn over battledress along with a *keffiyeh* (Arab headdress). In the background two men wearing battledress prepare to take a star shoot. By the winter of 1942/43 most men wore either Royal Tank Regiment black berets, cap comforters or balaclavas while out on operations. Uniform then mainly consisted of battledress blouses and trousers, with either a Tropal coat or greatcoat worn on top, giving LRDG patrols some degree of uniformity they had often lacked before. Although sometimes worn on patrol for warmth, the distinctive LRDG *keffiyeh* was normally reserved for wearing at base or while on leave. The physical appearance of those on patrol rapidly deteriorated while in the desert. A strict embargo on the amount of water each day meant shaving and washing were largely impossible. By the end of a patrol most men sported unkempt beards, dirty faces and clothing that was heavily worn by the rigours of desert life.



The members of Y1 Patrol eat lunch in the shadow of the wing of a wrecked Lysander at Melfa, May 1942. (HU 25288 LRDG Collection)



surrounding area. For those not immediately retiring for a well-earned rest, the small receiving set carried by the WT truck was used to listen to the 8.00pm BBC news and popular shows such as *The Crazy Gang* and Tommy Handley's *ITMA*. Others read or played cards. Some patrol members with pressing work to complete on wayward vehicles or a signaller struggling with poor atmospheric conditions, however, laboured on well into the night before bedding down.

EXPERIENCE IN BATTLE

The LRDG and 'road watch'

The LRDG carried out a range of covert intelligence-gathering missions during the Desert War. What became known as 'road watch' was arguably the most daring, difficult and dangerous of these and has always been regarded as the most important. For many months LRDG patrols travelled deep behind enemy lines and covertly observed the main Axis lines of communication. From a camouflaged 'hide' located within 300m of chosen roads, patrolmen carefully noted down the number and details of every Axis tank, lorry and other vehicle travelling to and from the front line. This information was quickly relayed to GHQ ME. It was a specialized mission very specific to the Desert War, and possible only because the Axis forces were dependent on a very limited number of deep-water ports – Tripoli and to a far lesser extent Benghazi – for offloading tanks, reinforcements, petrol and supplies. These were transported in turn along the only metalled road – the Via Balbia – to frontline units. By far the most successful and longest road watch was that carried out on the Tripoli–Benghazi road. From 2 March to 21 July 1942 and 30 October to 29 December 1942 this route was kept under near-continuous observation by LRDG patrols.

The intelligence-gathering potential of covertly observing the Axis lines of communication, as a means of assessing enemy strengths, intentions and general conditions, became apparent to senior LRDG officers early in the Desert War. It was a task that fitted the LRDG's capabilities perfectly given its



ability to penetrate deep behind enemy lines using the inner desert as a route to and from a suitable observation post (OP) and communicate back information over long distances by radio. The LRDG, moreover, was capable of doing what aerial reconnaissance could not – provide intelligence of considerable accuracy, detail and timeliness unaffected by weather conditions. A search for a suitable vantage point overlooking the Via Balbia began during a reconnaissance mission in July–August 1941 in the Sirte Desert, carried out by T Patrol. With typical thoroughness Bill Kennedy Shaw, the LRDG's intelligence officer, identified and made careful notes about an upland area offering suitable vantage points and good cover lying just to the south of the Via Balbia 56km west of El Agheila near Ras Lanuf. It was near an imposing triumphal arch called the Arae Philaenorum, which straddled the Via Balbia at the boundary point between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. This striking edifice, visible for miles, was quickly dubbed 'Marble Arch' by British soldiers, given its resemblance to a similar edifice at Park Lane in London. This position also had a suitable place to conceal patrol vehicles nearby – an area of scrub in a shallow wadi bed running from the low hills towards the coast, located 4km from the road and 8km from Marble Arch. The broken terrain also provided good cover for vehicles approaching and leaving the position.

The LRDG began its first trial traffic census in September 1941 when S2 Patrol, commanded by Second Lieutenant John Olivey, carefully reconnoitred the coast road westwards of El Agheila. A census of road traffic was carefully taken by his Rhodesians between 18 and 25 September 1941 from atop a low hill, despite the surveillance party being discovered by some wandering Arabs, enemy convoys camping overnight near the hidden observers on two occasions and the patrol harbour nearly being spotted by a reconnaissance aircraft. During the 168 hours S2 Patrol spent watching the road it noted, for example, that 1,218 lorries, 131 military and civil cars, 111 DR motorcycles and 556 motorcycles and motorcycle combinations belonging to German fighting units had travelled eastbound. A smaller number travelled westbound: 764 lorries, 59 military and civilian cars and 13 motorcycles. Some 30 four-wheeled armoured cars, 27 tanks and 44 guns had also travelled eastbound.

The sheer immensity of desert wastes through which the LRDG patrolled in itself provided considerable protection from enemy attack, except when patrols operated near the coastal plateau. (E 12385)

This valuable experience and the quality of the intelligence collected taught Lt. Col. Prendergast and his intelligence officer much about the limitations of LRDG observers, especially that they lacked training to recognize specific types of enemy AFV and lorry. Further experience helped refine methods of noting down information. A further reconnaissance of the coast road between 9 and 16 October 1941 was carried out by a party of S Patrol, on orders from GHQ ME, using the same location. On this occasion, during daylight hours the observers occupied a shallow sand pit 500m south of the road to get more accurate information, in addition to maintaining a continuous watch from a hill 3km away. A detailed questionnaire provided by GHQ ME asked for specific details about the construction of AFVs, artillery and trailers. It also asked about the nature of any convoys seen and about the types of headgear worn by enemy troops. As a result, the traffic census compiled by Captain Holliman was far more detailed than that done before, carefully cataloguing the different types of vehicle, as well as describing



Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Prendergast, Maj. Bill Kennedy Shaw (the intelligence officer) and another member of the LRDG enjoy a meal at the command post. (HU25097)

F ROAD WATCH

'Road watch' was a vital task carried out by the LRDG and arguably the most significant of its intelligence-gathering duties during the Desert War. Patrols were regularly tasked with observing Axis road traffic using the Via Balbia (and other routes) around the clock up to 965km behind enemy lines and recording the details over long periods of time for onward transmission to Cairo. In effect a 'census' was taken of different types of vehicles, condition and their loads. LRDG patrolmen became highly skilled at identifying AFVs, different types of vehicles and what they carried. Normally, detached parties of two men spent 24 hours lying up within a few hundred metres of a road at a suitable carefully camouflaged vantage point before being relieved by other men and returning to a nearby bivouac where the rest of the patrol was laid up. This illustration shows two LRDG patrolmen lying doggo behind cover observing an Axis supply convoy. Both are heavily clothed against the chill of a winter's day, with one wearing a Tropic coat and the other a shaggy, rather grubby and unkempt Hebron goatskin jacket over battledress. Road watch often entailed considerable hardship since those on surveillance duty had to lie without moving in the fierce heat or cold for fear of alerting the enemy to their presence. It required a strong nerve, moreover, with Axis troops in such close proximity. On occasion wandering Arabs compromised LRDG observers, while the danger of Axis troops suddenly moving off the road to camp or rest nearby was a constant concern.





A bearded LRDG patrolman, wearing a woollen cap comforter, sits at the wheel of his truck. The decision about what was worn on patrol was always left to individual LRDG patrolmen, with comfort being the key. (CBM 1212)

every group of vehicles spotted giving its direction, the date and time when it was seen and whether troops or loads were being transported.

The value of road watch as an intelligence-gathering tool had been clearly established and the fact that the LRDG evaded detection was judged particularly remarkable. The intelligence staff at GHQ ME was not slow to take advantage of this new source of information. Indeed, the need for reliable, accurate and timely intelligence about Axis strengths and intentions was pressing in January 1942 when Rommel launched a devastating counterstroke against 8th Army and surged forwards to the Gazala Line.

Those LRDG patrols committed to road watch during early 1942 were far better prepared for this

highly specialized task than their predecessors, with specific training and other preparations carried out to improve the accuracy of information provided by surveillance teams. Before each mission LRDG patrolmen were given recognition pamphlets and detailed photographs of different types of Axis vehicle. Visits were carried out to collections of captured Axis motor transport. To improve record taking, GHQ provided a detailed memorandum and album of photographs, along with Captain Enoch Powell (a university professor of such evident learning that he became known as 'Grey Matter' to patrolmen) to explain them. A mimeographed notebook given to each patrol listed technical designations, model numbers and had silhouettes of differing types of Axis vehicle. To improve record taking it also contained blank pages for listing numbers and types of enemy units, types of cargo and any information about special vehicle markings. These changes enabled LRDG patrolmen to give a far better running score of the type and volume of traffic heading eastwards towards the front, as well as westward-bound returning traffic.

The LRDG patrols carrying out road-watch duties at Marble Arch followed a set routine. Each patrol did a stint of ten to 14 days on duty given the acknowledged boredom, monotony and mental strain it always involved. An incoming LRDG patrol would be met at a rendezvous point far from the actual bivouac area, into which it was then carefully guided. When a patrol arrived its first task was to carefully conceal its vehicles from view from the air and ground, using scrim nets and interwoven foliage in the wadi bed. All tyre tracks visible from the air were carefully brushed away by hand. Overnight patrol commanders formally handed over while the first pair of new observers plus an additional member of the incoming patrol were taken to the OP by a guide. This guide then returned to the bivouac area along with the additional patrolman, who had now seen the hide and the route to it in both directions and thus could safely guide his own surveillance teams into position.

The observation of the road was always carried out by a two-man team that spent 24 hours on duty. Each team was normally woken at 0330hrs by a sentry. Following a hot cup of tea and a bite of food under cover of darkness they walked 3km down to the plain, carrying all the equipment, food and water required for the day. Before dawn the two men relieved those on duty and occupied a camouflaged hide, a shallow pit with overhead cover just high enough to remain hidden from view and provide some shade from the sun for men lying flat on their stomachs, where they remained for the rest of the day.

It was located 300m from the road on the plain in an area largely devoid of cover apart from some scattered scrub and Spinafex tufts. Road traffic could be observed through a small slit using binoculars or a telescope. Other patrolmen selected their own vantage point overlooking the road, however, believing that discovery in a carefully constructed hide might compromise their cover story of being lost in the desert. Apart from rolling over onto their backs, the danger of being spotted by traffic moving on the road or wandering Arabs meant movement by the observation team was impossible until darkness fell. A combination of this inability to move, blowing sand, intense heat during the summer or cold during the winter months made it an extremely testing and tiring experience. Time always dragged. The two men tasked with identifying and noting down Axis road traffic could not relax, except for a few brief periods when traffic on the road was marked by its absence. As David Lloyd Owen has described: 'It was an exacting task, for we were expected to give the details of every tank, the calibre of every gun, the classification of every vehicle, the number of troops or tonnage of stores in them and whether the truck was covered or uncovered, German or Italian, as well as the actual number of vehicles that went past our hiding place.' To provide details of divisional signs and unit designations patrolmen carefully approached to within 30–40m of the road when darkness fell.

Road watch was always extremely hazardous for the men on duty. Apart from being spotted by traffic using the roads or by parties of workmen, Axis convoys might at any time move off-road for a meal or to bivouac nearby. As one report noted: 'Reports on the day are accurate up to 1230hrs. From then onwards until darkness the road pickets were unable to look up or move ... as a convoy pulled in behind with the nearest vehicle at 150 yards.' The LRDG observers, moreover, might at any time be compromised by bands of nomadic Bedouin grazing their flocks. A real danger of being betrayed to Axis troops always existed since the inhabitants of Tripolitania often proved unfriendly. On one occasion, for example, an Arab tried to extract a bribe to keep quiet. On another occasion a bus full of children pulled off the road and played a game of rounders around the hide. If capture appeared likely each surveillance detachment was briefed to bury its notebook or else

LRDG patrolmen were highly skilled at building camouflaged hides to conceal their positions while carrying out covert road-watch duties deep behind Axis lines. (HU 24993)



tear up the pages. Indeed, in recognition that effective resistance was impossible without prejudicing the safety of the remainder of the patrol, some went unarmed and equipped with a carefully prepared cover story about being the lost survivors of an overrun British unit. If this ruse was successful the remainder of the patrol could then simply relocate its surveillance post.

The two-man road-watch team remained at their post until relieved at dawn the next day. While they enjoyed breakfast followed by a well-earned rest, the report they had carefully compiled was analysed by the patrol commander and compared with information gathered earlier. If a particularly important convoy or a concentration of Axis AFVs was spotted it was reported immediately by radio. If this was necessary the radio truck normally drove away from the bivouac area into the desert before transmitting to Group HQ in case an Axis radio-detection team operated nearby. Otherwise a longer and far more detailed report was sent when a patrol's stint of road watch had ended and it was en route to base. Immediately upon the return to base the patrol commander wrote up a detailed report complete with all traffic census information. Each patrol report normally ran into dozens of closely typed pages during busy periods on the roads, offering intelligence analysts at GHQ a rich fund of information for analysis.

Those patrolmen left in the hidden bivouac area always suffered badly from boredom, with a stint on picquet duty the only break from the monotony. The danger of being spotted from the air or by hostile Arabs meant movement around the wadi was strictly restricted and food was eaten cold as fires were forbidden. Apart from talking, playing cards, reading or listening to the radio, there was little to do apart from sleep or endure the heat under the shade provided by the camouflaged vehicles. To add to the discomfort, flies abounded in the wadi.

Road watch was always an extremely expensive commitment for the LRDG in terms of manpower keeping three complete patrols tied up at any one time. While one patrol carried out road-watch duties another was returning to base and a third was either en route or preparing to depart. The 965km

A column of LRDG vehicles in the Nile Valley while en route to Kufra, August 1942. The oasis at Kufra provided the LRDG with a vital base deep in the Libyan Desert, from where its patrols ranged across Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. (E 12376)



from Siwa to Marble Arch might take anything up to a week to cover depending on the route taken and the level of enemy activity.

The road watch carried out by LRDG patrolmen with such daring, boldness and skill was one of the great intelligence-gathering success stories of the Desert War. The simple fact that it was successfully maintained without interruption for such a long period was a tribute to the professionalism of the LRDG and its skill at covert intelligence gathering. Overall, the road watch provided a massive return on the investment of comparatively few officers, men and vehicles, although it was a heavy commitment given the small size of the LRDG and constant calls on its services. Ironically it was by far the most hated duty performed by the LRDG because of its monotony.

The road watch was regarded at the time and immediately after the war as of crucial importance in determining Axis strengths and general intentions. The true significance of the intelligence gathered, however, can only be accurately gauged when compared with that garnered from other sources. What LRDG officers and most early historians of the desert war did not know was that the road watch played only a supporting role in GHQ Middle East's efforts to build up an accurate intelligence assessment of Axis forces. Indeed, the main purpose of the road watch was providing accurate empirical information that helped verify and assess intelligence obtained from Top Secret Y Service radio intercepts and ULTRA decrypts. Since the spring of 1940 British HQ had routinely intercepted and decrypted German high level radio traffic encoded through the use of the supposedly unbreakable Enigma code. As a result it enjoyed an enormous advantage conferred by having detailed knowledge of the composition, strength and location of Axis forces, as well as vital information about enemy intentions. This flow of high-level information was not without its limitations, however, and the trustworthy information provided by the LRDG helped counterbalance this information and accurately confirm how Axis forces would actually be employed at the tactical level. The road watch, moreover, offered continuity and certainty at times when signals intelligence was unreliable. Lastly, LRDG road watch teams also provided a perfect cover to which intelligence obtained from ULTRA could otherwise be attributed.

The raid on Barce, September 1942

The sharply deteriorating military situation in early autumn 1942 prompted GHQ ME to plan four ambitious raids deep behind enemy lines. Intended to disrupt Rommel's vulnerable ever-lengthening lines of communication, these included large-scale raids by commandos and the Special Air Service (SAS) respectively on the vital enemy supply ports of Benghazi and Tobruk, and also on Jalo Oasis four days later by the Sudan Defence Force. The LRDG provided guides for all these ambitious ventures, as well as carrying out a subsidiary diversionary raid – Operation *Caravan* – on its own on the Italian-held town and airfield at Barce in Gebel Akhdar in northern Cyrenaica. The key to all



An LRDG Chevrolet 30cwt truck belonging to T Patrol gets ready to leave Cairo, 25 May 1942. The bars, clubs and sights of this bustling city provided LRDG patrolmen with a welcome break from life in the desert. (E 2348)

these disparate operations was surprise, careful coordination and detailed prior preparation and planning.

The LRDG raiding force chosen for the Barce raid consisted of the New Zealanders of T1 Patrol (led by Captain Nick Wilder) and the British guardsmen of G1 Patrol (led by Captain Alastair Timpson), under the overall command of Major Jake Easonsmith with assistance in gathering last-minute intelligence provided by Major Vladimir 'Popski' Peniakoff and two Senussi other ranks from the Libyan Arab Force. A small detachment from B Squadron's HQ also participated, including the medical officer, Captain Dick Lawson. To carry the 47 attackers the 1,860km from Faiyum in Egypt to the objective, 12 trucks and five jeeps were employed. Two 10-ton Mack NR trucks from the heavy section accompanied them to Ain Dalla to refill fuel tanks. Captain John Olivey's S2 Patrol travelled with them before departing on its own mission.

Operation *Caravan* began on 1 September when the raiding force left Faiyum in Egypt, beginning a 1,850km journey far to the south, and then across the Great and Kalansho Sand Seas before swinging northwards to the Gebel Akhdar. By autumn 1942 it was a well-trodden route. As always, desert travel proved hazardous. During the crossing of the Egyptian Sand Sea a jeep carrying Capt. Alastair Timpson and his driver shot over the blind side of a razorback dune and plunged downward a distance of 6m. The impact fractured the patrol commander's skull and knocked out several teeth. Guardsman Thomas Wann suffered a fractured spine that paralysed him from the waist downwards for life. Fortunately the LRDG's medical officer, Capt. Lawson, was at hand and after being transported to Big Cairn two days later they were evacuated by air to Egypt. Patrols G1 and T1, meanwhile, moved to Howard's Cairn where they rendezvoused with part of the heavy section loaded with additional fuel and stores. Captain Lawson hurriedly caught up with the main body and S2 Patrol departed on its own mission as part of Operation *Bigamy* at Benghazi.

The rest of the approach march to Barce passed largely without incident, with the column crossing the arch linking the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas via Garet Khod and then the northern gravel plain. En route a 'spare' Chevrolet 30cwt truck, loaded with food, water and petrol, was hidden near Bir el Gerrari as an emergency rendezvous. Despite earlier delays the LRDG strike force reached Benia, 24km from Barce Township, by 13 September, the day scheduled for the attack, and Maj. Easonsmith transported Peniakoff and two Senussi tribesmen to within 3km of the outskirts for a brief



The successful raid on Barce was carried out by G and T patrols in September 1942 by a mixed force of Willys jeeps and Chevrolet trucks. Major Jake Easonsmith, leader of the raid, is sitting behind the wheel of the nearest jeep. (HU 16666)

The Barce Raid, September 1942



reconnaissance. Unknown to the raiders, the LRDG column had already been spotted and nearby Italian units alerted by Barce Sector Command. Following a day spent in preparation, hidden amidst some olive trees and stunted pines, the two LRDG patrols set off as dusk gathered.

The LRDG column made steady progress towards its objective, after cutting nearby telephone lines, before encountering a police post at Sidi bu Raui. Trooper Mahomed Bu Masaud on duty outside the small post was quickly relieved of his rifle and bundled aboard one of the trucks. An NCO who investigated the noise was killed and Sergeant Dennis threw several grenades into the post before the convoy left, albeit leaving behind two damaged trucks that had collided in the darkness. An Italian machine gun, however, opened up shortly afterwards, though the column quickly silenced it. Clearly the element of surprise had been lost. Major Peniakoff rejoined them at Sidi Selim although both Arabs failed to appear. As planned, the valuable WT truck and medical officer were left behind to act as an emergency rendezvous.

The LRDG column, driving with headlights blazing in imitation of an Italian convoy, moved towards the town at approximately 2330hrs. A few miles outside Barce at the top of an escarpment two Italian light tanks were encountered parked on either side of the main road. Dazzled by the beams, however, neither of their sleepy crews realized that the enemy were upon them until each received a broadside from each LRDG truck as they passed unscathed between them.

Patrols T1 and G1 separated at midnight at a fork in the road immediately outside Barce: T1 Patrol went to the left to attack the airfield and G1 Patrol, now commanded by Sgt. Dennis, went straight on to the Campo Maddalena barracks to neutralize its occupants, cut telephone lines and then damage the railway station. Two hours were allocated for each task. Independently, Maj. Easonsmith drove into the centre of the town with two heavily armed Willys jeeps.

The attack on Barce airfield proved a resounding success. A gate barring entry was quickly opened and T Patrol, consisting of a Willys jeep and four 30cwt Chevrolet trucks, drove into the base. A fuel dump, petrol tanker and trailer were set alight and the resulting flames belched unchecked, illuminating the surrounding area. Several hand grenades were thrown into a nearby building. The LRDG vehicles, moving in single file, then drove around the airfield firing mixed tracer and ball ammunition from their machine guns at parked aircraft. To ensure complete destruction, a corporal in the last vehicle planted incendiary time bombs on any aircraft not already engulfed in flame. An hour later a delighted T1 Patrol finally withdrew, having destroyed or damaged 35 enemy aircraft without suffering a single casualty. Success was largely due to the overwhelming firepower produced by T1 Patrol's massed machine guns and the gunners' skill.

Elsewhere, the situation was also highly encouraging. With Sgt. Dennis at its head, G1 Patrol entered Barce, where it quickly pulled down some telephone lines and killed two Italian sentries. Noise from the airfield, however, had already alerted the barracks. A small group of Italians standing outside on the low veranda were showered with grenades and then intense Vickers K and 20mm Breda gunfire was pumped into the building's interior. Some return fire was experienced from several Italian soldiers who had leapt into nearby slit trenches. A lull in the firing, a shortage of grenades and the clear success of the airfield attack convinced Sgt. Dennis that it was time to



withdraw. Two Italian L3 light tanks blocking the only exit from the barracks, however, caused a sudden rethink. Following a brief game of 'cat and mouse' with an Italian L3, a gap was found in the perimeter wall. Although the escaping guardsmen successfully crossed an anti-tank ditch barring the way, a jeep was lost in the process. A truck also became separated from the main body in the confusion. This badly damaged vehicle did not get far, although the four-man crew escaped on foot. Two men were eventually rescued, another was captured and the final patrolman found shelter with friendly Bedouin. The main body of the patrol then withdrew as planned to Sidi Selim.

The Italian reaction to the LRDG raid slowly gathered strength, intensity and momentum. With his ammunition supply dwindling Capt. Wilder decided to withdraw T1 Patrol from the airfield. As it withdrew through the town, four L3 light tanks were encountered firing up and down the main streets. By driving at full tilt an Italian light tank was rammed out of the way by Capt. Wilder's 30cwt truck, although it was wrecked as it cannoned into another. This manoeuvre had the desired effect, however, of clearing the way for the vehicles behind. Following further attempts to destroy the tanks by throwing grenades under them, Capt. Wilder and his crew quickly boarded a jeep. While moving at great speed Capt. Wilder's Willys jeep overturned, pinning its unconscious or wounded occupants underneath. The crew of the following Chevrolet quickly disentangled them from the wreckage and revived them before they reached the rendezvous. The rammed Italian tank was immobilized by the crew of another truck, meanwhile, who jumped upon it and put it out of action using grenades. Unfortunately, grenade fragments injured a New Zealand patrolman before the truck finally made good its escape. The last LRDG truck was cut off by an Italian Autoblinda 41 armoured car and set on fire as it raced along the streets, and it eventually crashed into a concrete roadside shelter. The gunner and two other injured crew members were taken prisoner. Although the driver initially escaped, he was later captured.

Major Easonsmith led his two jeeps into Barce to cause as much chaos and confusion as possible by attacking targets of opportunity. Fortunately, they avoided two Italian light tanks and threw grenades at Italian troops and into various occupied buildings. Ten parked lorries and a tanker and trailer

ABOVE LEFT

An LRDG truck armed with a .55in. Boys anti-tank rifle and a Mk 1 Lewis Gun drives carefully down a sandy hill. These weapons were issued early during the Desert War and were later replaced by other automatic weapons. (E 2298)

ABOVE

An LRDG patrolman poses with a single gas-operated Vickers K machine gun mounted in the cab of a Chevrolet 30cwt truck. These fearsome weapons, originally salvaged from wrecked RAF aircraft, produced a massive volume of firepower. (E 12410)

were destroyed by machine-gun fire. Major Easonsmith then rejoined the rest of the withdrawing raiding force.

The LRDG strike force – now with only three jeeps and seven Chevrolet trucks – rendezvoused at the crossroad as planned, before withdrawing down the main road and then southwards towards the rallying point at Sidi Selim. However, G Patrol's top-heavy 20mm Breda truck toppled over suddenly in the darkness, and it was not until just before dawn that it was righted and the column picked up the medical officer and wireless truck at Sidi Selim. Much valuable time and the hours of darkness had been lost. Just before dawn, as they reached Peniakoff's original drop-off point, they were ambushed by approximately 150–180 Tripolitanian infantrymen belonging to the 7th Savari Cavalry. Although a truck was damaged and three men were wounded, the Italian attack was poorly handled and Sgt. Dennis kept the advancing enemy at bay in his jeep until the truck's damaged wheel was changed. The LRDG successfully ran the gauntlet without further loss. After reaching the police post the two other trucks abandoned during the approach march were taken in tow.

The LRDG column was given little respite when it briefly halted to brew up, treat the wounded and repair the three vehicles in tow. A group of mounted Tripolitanian cavalry suddenly appeared out of the darkness, followed soon afterwards by infantry, while overhead two CR.42 Falco fighter-bombers appeared. Major Easonsmith successfully drove off an impromptu ground attack by charging the enemy aboard a Willys jeep. This act of bravery bought sufficient time for stores to be offloaded, time bombs to be placed aboard the three damaged vehicles and for the LRDG to break contact.

The escaping LRDG vehicles were spotted by a Ca311 reconnaissance aircraft, however, after G Patrol's wireless truck broke down on an exposed hillside. At 1030hrs six CR.42 fighter-bombers appeared overhead just after the LRDG had hidden its remaining vehicles under thick low-branched trees. From mid-morning until dusk relays of fighter-bombers attacked, who picked

G

'BEAT-UPS'

LRDG patrols carried out 'beat-ups' or raids comparatively infrequently when compared with their other duties of reconnaissance, surveillance and intelligence gathering. They took many forms: hit-and-run attacks on Axis lines of communication, airfields, other base installations, isolated outposts and transport, with the LRDG ruthlessly exploiting surprise and the firepower and mobility of their heavily armed trucks to wreak havoc and then disappear into the vastness of the desert. In this image a representative LRDG patrol attacks a small convoy utilizing surprise and the devastating firepower produced by its vehicle-mounted automatic weapons to inflict as much damage and demoralization as possible. A heavily loaded 20mm Breda Gun truck brings up the rear of the column. On other occasions patrols set up ambushes or laid mines on key routes to disrupt road traffic. LRDG patrols also participated in several large-scale raids, most notably at Murzuk and later at Barce in September 1942. For some time a close 'raiding partnership' was struck up between the LRDG and the newly formed Special Air Service, with the former navigating and transporting the latter to their objectives deep behind enemy lines. For many patrolmen such direct action was a welcome break and fillip to morale from the normal monotony and boredom associated with LRDG patrols.

The majority of these very small-scale raids against Axis troops were undertaken in direct support of 8th Army (or its predecessors). During Operation *Crusader* for example, LRDG patrols operated offensively against Axis supply convoys supporting the main battle. Such 'acts of piracy' and 'freebooting' often had an impact far out of proportion to their size, causing the diversion of enemy troops to rear areas, but carried with them the serious risk of losing valuable and very difficult-to-replace LRDG personnel and vehicles during attacks or the inevitable Axis reaction. The growing strength and mobility of the SAS ultimately meant that the LRDG carried out fewer and fewer of these direct actions, largely incompatible with their primary role, and concentrated instead on surveillance and intelligence gathering.



off LRDG vehicles one by one and then strafed patrolmen hiding nearby. Everything that could be saved was removed from the burning vehicles in the 20-minute gap between air attacks. By last light only two jeeps and two trucks remained desert-worthy. When it appeared the Italians had finally departed, salvaged food and water were loaded aboard T1 Patrol's wireless truck, but unfortunately shortly afterwards two aircraft unexpectedly returned and left it a burning wreck. It had been an extremely difficult day for the raiding force. During the attacks Capt. Wilder was shot through both legs and another guardsman injured, increasing the number of wounded men to six. No radio remained intact to call for help.

Major Easonsmith and his men faced a daunting task in making good their escape, but he was convinced Prendergast would realize something was amiss and dispatch a patrol to his aid. As soon as darkness fell the 33 exhausted surviving LRDG patrolmen departed southwards towards Bir el Gerrari. Only two jeeps and one Chevrolet, loaded with the wounded and everything salvageable, remained serviceable to make the 1,125km journey to Kufra. Food and water were in short supply. The plight of the wounded together with the need to make a smaller target in case of air attack convinced Maj. Easonsmith that the party should separate. A jeep carrying Capt. Lawson and Maj. Peniakoff and the remaining truck loaded with the wounded departed southwards. The remainder of the party – 14 men and one jeep loaded with stores – plodded onwards to the same objective independently.

The walking party led by Maj. Easonsmith steadily trudged southwards. Unfortunately, during the first night it separated into two parties and a New Zealand medical orderly went missing. A combination of the intense heat and a shortage of water made life extremely trying, and many men, used to travelling in vehicles, suffered badly from sore feet. On 15 September they encountered an Arab encampment where a lamb was purchased. Although no water could be spared enough milk was drunk to revitalize the patrol long enough until a well was found the following day. Early on the morning of 17 September, following a footsore march of 130km, Maj. Easonsmith, Sgt. Dennis and four guardsmen met S2 Patrol returning from Operation *Bigamy*. The encounter occurred purely by chance. The patrol immediately travelled to Bir el Gerrari, but no sign was found of the other walking party. Leaving Maj. Easonsmith behind with vehicles to search for his remaining stragglers, three trucks carried the survivors of the Barce raid to Kufra.

The second walking party led by Trooper Jopling, a navigator, made its own way towards Bir El Gerrari. With only a silk escape map, a dim memory of what had been seen on a larger map and the stars, navigation was a constant problem for the badly wounded trooper. A chance encounter with some Bedouins secured some water, and more water and food was found the following day. The party plodded slowly onwards despite the burning heat and growing exhaustion. Jopling's leg wound, however, meant that he and another exhausted guardsman lagged behind. On 19 September Maj. Easonsmith and S2 Patrol found three guardsmen near Bir El Gerrari and five more were located shortly afterwards. Jopling and Gutteridge, however, were in acute difficulty. A combination of his now-gangrenous foot, a lack of water and the belief that they were too late to make the rendezvous finally convinced Jopling and his companion to stop. Both men entered an Arab encampment whose occupants handed them over to the Italians.

Major Easonsmith's determination to keep searching for survivors paid off, when two of the missing guardsmen from the G Patrol truck lost in Barce



were picked up near Bir el Gerrari. On 21 September, however, the search for remaining walkers was finally abandoned.

The poor terrain initially meant that the vehicle party led by the medical officer made slow progress. A bullet hole through the jeep's radiator led to its abandonment since water could not be spared. As soon as level terrain was reached the heavily overloaded truck drew away. The broken terrain and darkness, however, made driving extremely hazardous. When the vehicle left the Gebel Akhdar on 15 September it made rapid progress over the gravel plain. At 1600hrs Capt. Lawson reached Bir el Gerrari where he collected food, water and a spare tyre from the hidden truck before continuing onwards to an emergency landing strip (LG 125) near the Kalansho Sand Sea that had often been used as a rallying point and where it was hoped they would encounter an LRDG patrol. Without a working theodolite or radio the party relied on dead reckoning alone to find the landing strip. Luck was with them. On 17 September Capt. Lawson bumped into Capt. Owen's Y1 Patrol, who had been directed there by LRDG HQ after being alerted to Lawson's plans by Maj. Easonsmith, who had been picked up earlier that day. On 18 September the wounded were evacuated to Kufra by a Bristol Bombay transport aircraft.

Unlike the failed raids carried out on Benghazi, Tobruk and Jalo, the Barce raid was a complete success, inflicting considerable material and psychological damage on the Italian defenders, who paid a heavy price for their complacency. Although Italian and LRDG accounts differ about the exact number, an impressive number of aircraft were destroyed on the ground. Whether the raid had successfully diverted Italian troops away from the other objectives targeted for raids that night, however, is more difficult to ascertain. Even so, the Barce raid was a considerable feat of arms for the LRDG and was its most successful 'beat-up' of the Desert War. As Brendan Carroll has observed: 'The operation encompassed all the elements common to the success of other LRDG operations: overcoming the difficulties

An LRDG truck moves back through Gebel Akhdar following the Barce raid in September 1942. This well-watered area had farmland and a comparatively large population. (HU 71335)



of desert travel, good navigation, independent action, fortitude, evasion and survival against the odds. Typically the role of the LRDG had been like that of the scorpion: to hide, watch and wait. This time they were out in the open and able to fully demonstrate the devastating sting in their tail.'

For their gallantry during the Barce raid and the ensuing withdrawal Maj. Easonsmith and Capt. Wilder were both awarded the Distinguished Service Order, Capt. Lawson the Military Cross and three New Zealanders from T1 Patrol were given the Military Medal. The Barce raid was not, however, without cost, with eight patrolmen wounded in action, three injured and 11 others taken prisoner. Although no fatalities were suffered, considerable hardship was experienced by the wounded during the long march home.

AFTERMATH

The LRDG without doubt had fought a very successful Desert War. It had been almost constantly in the field – only 15 days passed without a patrol operating behind or on the flanks of the enemy between 26 December 1940 and 10 April 1943 – fully exploiting its unchallenged mastery of the inner Libyan Desert.

The greatest contribution it, and to a lesser degree its offshoot the ILRS, had made to victory was without doubt in terms of deep reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, including the road watch, in which it excelled. This unique special force provided a flow of unrivalled accurate, timely and reliable tactical and topographical intelligence. This information greatly aided staff planning at GHQ ME and directly contributed to the course and ultimately successful conduct of the hard-fought main battle. The topographical intelligence the LRDG provided, impossible to secure by any other means, was alone of extreme importance and arguably justified the existence of the unit.

The precise contribution made by intelligence provided by the LRDG is difficult to quantify, however, since this was not the only source of information upon which GHQ ME relied, and also until the apparatus for collecting and disseminating detailed, accurate and timely intelligence had been surmounted at GHQ ME it was not always fully exploited. Albeit always important, the significance of the information provided by road watch, for example, must be re-evaluated in light of the quality and quantity of information provided by ULTRA. Undoubtedly it was not as decisive as some commentators, writing before the existence of ULTRA was known, have claimed. The intelligence provided by the LRDG was used primarily to verify information obtained from ULTRA, although the intelligence provided by road-watch teams had some clear advantages in terms of continuity, certainty and reliability, especially at times when signals intelligence was incomplete and unpredictable.

The value of the information the LRDG provided in the final analysis far, far outstripped the physical damage inflicted by 'beat-ups' carried out by the LRDG alone, apart from the difficult-to-quantify diversion of enemy troops, vehicles and aircraft to protect rear areas. It had undoubtedly been worthwhile in 1940, by spreading alarm and diverting Italian forces away from the main battle, especially during Operation *Compass*. However, although offensive operations were dramatic and the tangible destruction of enemy vehicles and troops undoubtedly provided a 'tonic' to jaded LRDG patrolmen, the actual damage inflicted between 1941 and 1943 was always minimal. A question mark remains in final analysis regarding whether



Members of Y Patrol read mail from home at Siwa Oasis in May 1942. Letters from home nearly always provided a boost to morale. (CBM 2219)

'beat-ups' justified the risk to and actual losses to the highly trained LRDG men and specialist vehicles they often entailed.

The LRDG also played an important role in path-finding for conventional formations and other units, as well as transporting various special forces to and from their objectives. This was a direct corollary of its acknowledged skill at desert navigation and travel. Without the LRDG's assistance in this respect and general guidance the SAS would undoubtedly have struggled to find its feet. Most notable was the final LRDG contribution to the Desert War as part of Operation *Pugilist*, when a small detachment from T2 Patrol guided the New Zealand Corps to victory.

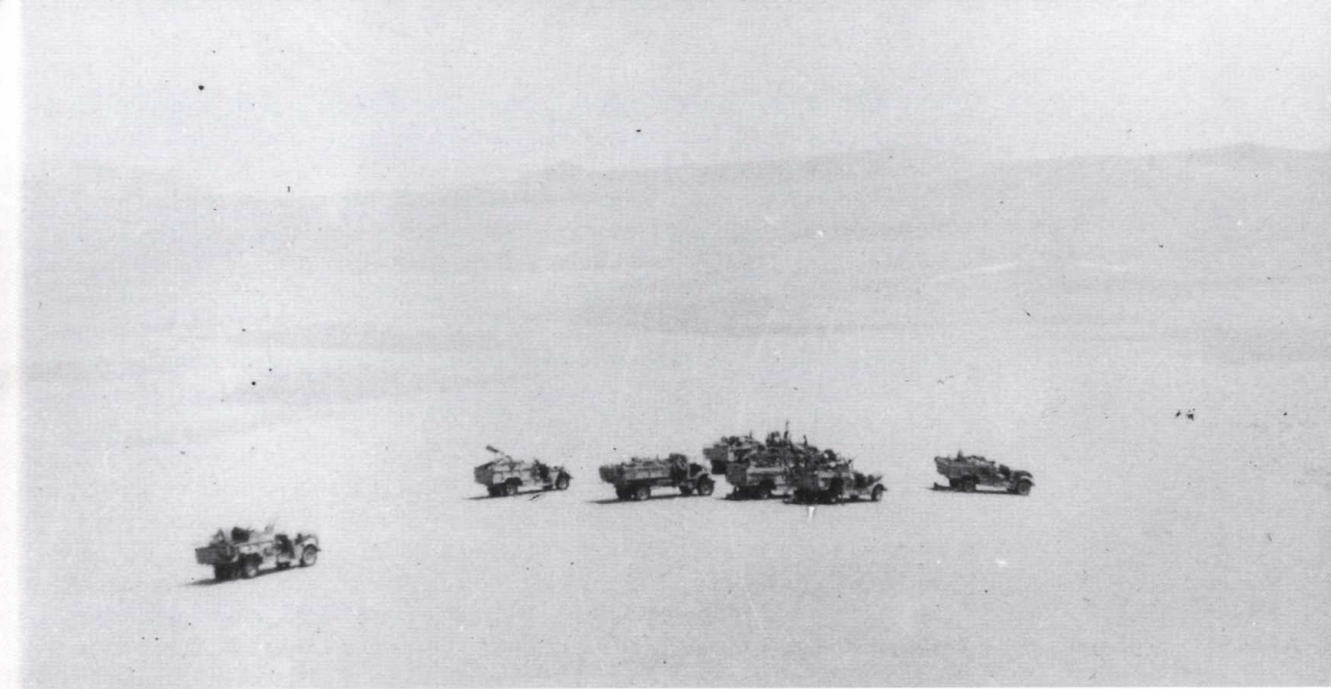
The LRDG's successes were ultimately very much down to the young, fit and enthusiastic 'ordinary' patrolmen – officers, NCOs and men – that filled its ranks. These specially selected and courageous patrolmen willingly withstood protracted and extreme hardship, adapted to living, moving and fighting deep in the Libyan Desert and accepted without demur all the perils near-constant behind-the-lines work entailed. While individually the death of each patrolman was a tragic loss, overall the unit paid a remarkably low price in casualties during the Desert War. Nearly a third of its men won honours and awards during this time, giving testimony to the bravery and skill with which the LRDG had carried out its challenging mission.

World War II was far from over for the LRDG, with a new role found in southern Europe and the Balkans by mid-summer. As David Lloyd Owen later summed up: 'Our role was recce, shipping and aircraft reporting, and communications and liaison with partisans.' During the summer of 1943 the LRDG reorganized, re-equipped and retrained in Lebanon on the basis it would deploy small patrols (one officer and ten men) primarily operating on foot capable of operating and maintaining communications 160km behind enemy lines. Before completing its training, the LRDG was committed in September 1943 as part of the ill-conceived Aegean campaign. Fighting in an infantry role the LRDG lost heavily. During the course of a single operation on the island of Levita on 24 October 1943, for example, the LRDG lost more men – two officers and 39 men – than it had during the entire Desert War. Worse followed on Leros where many highly experienced and irreplaceable old 'desert hands' were either killed in action, posted missing or captured when in November 1943 the Germans seized the island.

The resurrected LRDG took to the field again on 16 May 1944, although by then it was a very different unit. For the rest of the war it carried out a series of long-range reconnaissance missions in Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece demonstrating its continued effectiveness at behind-the-lines operations.

The LRDG did not outlive the end of hostilities in Europe. Although its transfer to the Far East had been mooted, in June 1945 the War Office informed its CO that it was surplus to requirements. Although this news shocked many LRDG veterans, it was largely unsurprising. As David Lloyd Owen recorded in his personal diary: 'There is perhaps some consolation in feeling that we are going out on the crest of a wave when our star could not have been brighter.' Without further fanfare, on 1 August 1945 – five years and 14 days after it had been formed in Cairo – the LRDG officially disbanded.

The ILRS lingered on for a while, although it had fared far less well than its 'parent' unit following the end of the North African campaign. In mid-1943 it had returned to India hoping it would serve in Burma. Instead, the ILRS spent the rest of the war in Baluchistan and East Persia reconnoitring routes, performing escort duties and patrolling the Persian-



Afghan border to discourage Soviet infiltration. In 1947 this direct offshoot of the LRDG was also disbanded.

The LRDG has left an enduring legacy in terms of its guiding principles, tactical methods and sheer professionalism. As Julian Thompson has written: 'Theirs was a yardstick by which one should gauge those [special forces] that came after them.' Undoubtedly its early successes acted as a fillip to the formation of the other special forces in British service, most notably the SAS with whom the LRDG established a close bond. Indeed, it remains a role model and inspiration for the modern-day British SAS and similar special forces as a covert long-range reconnaissance and surveillance unit capable of operating deep in the enemy's rear for protracted periods. Indeed, many of the skills learnt by the LRDG during its long desert patrols have had to be relearned in post-war counterinsurgency campaigns. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, for example, the small SAS motorized columns that ranged across the desert displayed an uncanny resemblance to the LRDG desert patrols.

An LRDG patrol crosses the sand sea on the return journey from Tobruk. (HU 24989 LRDG Collection)

MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

The main archival repository for documents relating to the LRDG in North Africa can be found in the National Archives at Kew in London. This includes policy documents relating to the organization and planning for LRDG operations in the WO 203 series, as well as war diaries and similar documents perhaps of greater interest to the general public. The files contain useful reports, for example, related to the LRDG's activities, including several dealing with the Barce raid. A caveat should be added about the war diaries, however, since they vary greatly in coverage and quality and often the original documents contained in appendices to each monthly report have gone missing. A lengthy and detailed history prepared by Brigadier H. W. Wynter, written for the Historical Section of the War Cabinet, outlining the activities of the LRDG in North Africa is also available, but fortunately it has also recently been published by the National Archive along with an account of the

activities of the SAS (see bibliography). The main source of information elsewhere is located at the Imperial War Museum at Lambeth in London. Several manuscript or typescript accounts of service with the LRDG have been deposited with the museum that throw light on the everyday life of patrolmen. By far the most important source are the papers and photographs deposited by Maj. Gen. David Lloyd Owen and the now sadly defunct Long Range Desert Group Association, which contain a wealth of information about the raising, organizing and training of the LRDG. The National Army Museum in Chelsea also has some material and displays relating to the LRDG.

The availability of LRDG ephemera with good provenance for collectors is far more limited. This is a direct product of the small size of the unit and its short-lived wartime existence. While items of uniform, webbing and other equipment similar to that worn by LRDG patrolmen on active service have survived the war, very little is what was actually worn on patrol (apart from within a few private collections). Those on offer at auction houses and on eBay should be treated with considerable care. Items of insignia – cap badges and shoulder titles – are perhaps the most widely available of items relating to the LRDG, but should be treated with caution given the large number of fakes and reproductions on the market. Similarly, the regrettable British and Rhodesian decision to issue campaign medals without naming them to the recipient means single medals or groups attributed to the LRDG should be treated with considerable circumspection unless accompanied by supporting paperwork, or unless they include a named gallantry award. Fortunately, the New Zealand government was not so penny-pinching.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Special Forces in the Desert War* (PRO: London, 2001)
- Bagnold, R. A., 'Early Days of the Long Range Desert Group' in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 105 (Jan–Feb 1945) pp.30–42
- , *Sand, Wind & War: Memoirs of a Desert Explorer* (University of Arizona Press: Tuscon, 1990)
- Clayton, Peter, *Desert Explorer: A Biography of Colonel P. A. Clayton* (Zerzura Press, 1998)
- Constable, Trevor, 'Bagnold's Bluff: The Little Known Figure Behind Britain's Daring Long Range Desert Patrols' in *Hidden Heroes* (Arthur Barker: London, 1971)
- Crichton-Stuart, Michael, *G Patrol: The Story of the Guards Patrol of The Long Range Desert Group* (Purnell Book Services: London, 1976)
- Fourie, Craig, Pittaway, Jonathan and Broster, Alison, *LRDG Rhodesia: Rhodesians in the Long Range Desert Group* (Dandy Agencies: Durban, 2002)
- Gordon, John W., *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940–1943* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1987)
- Griffith, Paddy, *World War II Desert Tactics* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2008)
- Gross, Kuno, Charvetto, Roberto and O'Carroll, Brendan, *Incident at Gebel Sherif: In Search of the First Clash of Special Forces 1941/2009* (Kuno Gross: Singapore, 2009)
- Hargreaves, Andrew L., 'The Advent, Evolution and Value of British Specialist Formations in the Desert War 1940–43' in *Global War Studies* (Forthcoming 2010)

- Jenner, Robin, List, David, Sarson, Peter and Badrocke, Mike, *The Long Range Desert Group 1940–1945* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 1999)
- Kay, R. L., *Long Range Desert Group in the Mediterranean* (Official: Wellington, 1949)
- Kelly, Saul, *The Lost Oasis: The Desert War and the Hunt for Zerzura* (John Murray: London, 2002)
- Kennedy Shaw, W. B., *Long Range Desert Group* (Collins: London, 1945)
- Owen, David Lloyd, *Desert My Dwelling Place: With the Long Range Desert Group in North Africa* (Arms and Armour: London, 1986)
- Owen, David Lloyd and Keegan, John, *The Long Range Desert Group 1940–1945: Providence Their Guide* (Pen and Sword: London, 2001)
- Molinari, Andrea, *Desert Raiders: Axis and Allied Special Forces 1940–44* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2007)
- Moreman, Tim, *Desert Rats: British 8th Army in North Africa 1941–43* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2007)
- Morgan, Mike, *The Sting of the Scorpion: In Action with the Long Range Desert Group* (Sutton: London, 2000)
- O'Carroll, Brendan, *Bearded Brigands: The LRDG in the Diaries/Photographs of Trooper Frank Jopling* (Pen and Sword: London, 2003)
- , *Barce Raid. The Long Range Desert Group's Most Daring Exploit in World War II*, (Ngaio Press: Wellington, 2005)
- , *The Kiwi Scorpions: The Story of the New Zealanders in the Long Range Desert Group* (Token Publishing: London, 2000)
- Peniakoff, Vladimir, *Private Army* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1950)
- Swinson, Arthur, *The Raiders: Desert Strike Force* (McDonald and Co: London, 1968)
- Thompson, Julian, *The Imperial Museum Book Of War Behind Enemy Lines* (Sidgwick and Jackson: London, 1998)
- Thorne, Colin R. and Soar, Philip, 'R. A. Bagnold: A Biography and Extended Bibliography' in *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 21 (1996), pp.987–91
- Timpson, Alastair and Gibson-Watt, Andrew, *In Rommel's Backyard: Behind the Lines with the LRDG* (Pen and Sword: London, 2000)

Online Sources

- Long Range Desert Group Preservation Society <http://www.lrdg.org>
- Long Range Desert Group <http://www.lrdg.de/main.htm>

INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**.

Aegean campaign 60
Afrika Korps, Deutsche 8
aftermath 58–61
aircraft, Italian 54, 56
aircraft, WACO 32
aircraft attack, dangers 35, 43
appearance 23–25, 40, 44, 46
arch, Arae Philaenorum ('Marble Arch') 43, 46
Armstrong, Tpr 5

Babb, Tpr 'Tankie' 5
Bagnold, Brig. Ralph 6, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 27, 36
Barce raid (1942 – Operation *Caravan*) 9, 14, 49–50, 50, 51, 52–54, 56–58, 57
Barker, Capt. Trevor 32
battle, experience in 42–44, 46–50, 52–54, 56–58
BBC radio programmes 42
'beat-ups' 14, 54, 59–60 *see also* Barce raid
belief and belonging 20, 22–23
Benghazi 9, 42, 49, 50, 57
Bir El Garrari 56, 57
British Army
Army, 8th 9, 10, 46
General Headquarters, Middle East (GHQ ME) 12, 13, 18, 44, 46, 49, 58, 59
Kiwi Division 18–19
and Libyan Desert 10
New Zealand Corps 60
Royal Artillery section 8
Bu Masaud, Tpr Mahomed 52

Cairo 49
Citadel 8
camouflage 30, 35, 35, 47
camp, setting up 38–40
campaign, life on 30–32, 34–36, 38–40, 42
Carroll, Brendan 57
Cashin, Tpr Donald 5
Cave, LCol Arthur, MM 5
chronology 6, 8–9
Clayton, Maj. Pat 14, 18
collections 61–62
Coombs, Tpr L. D. 5
Crichton-Stuart, Michael 36
Croucher, Cpl Dick 16
Cyrenaica 9

Davies, Tpr Robert 5
Dennis, Sgt 52–53, 54, 56
Deutsche Afrika Korps 8
Devine, Pte 5
drivers 15

Easonsmith, Maj. Jake, DSO 22, 50, 50, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58
El Alamein, 1st and 2nd Battles of (1942) 9
equipment 23, 23–25, 24, 40, 44, 46 *see also* vehicles; weapons
compass, Bagnold sun 16, 16, 38, 39
dress 23–25, 40, 44, 46
radio, Marconi 17
radio, No. 11 HP 17, 17, 34
sand mats 15, 36, 36, 38
theodolite 16, 16, 40

Fezzan Expedition 8, 14, 27
food and drink 32, 32, 34, 38, 39, 40, 42, 42, 44
Fraser, Pte William 5
French, Free 8, 20

Gazala Line 9, 46
Gebel Akdar 49, 57, 57
German Afrika Korps 8
German codes 49, 59

Harding-Newman, Capt. Rupert 18
Harris, Cpl Jack 5
Harrison, Tpr F. Gordon 5
Haywood, Capt. Tim 17
Headquarters (HQ), LRDG 8, 9, 11, 12, 17
Holliman, Capt. 44, 46
Hutchins, Sgt Derek 5

Imperial War Museum 62
Indian Long Range Squadron (ILRS) 9, 12, 20, 20, 58, 60–61
insect life 31
intelligence, topographical 12, 12–13
Inter-Service Liaison Department (ISLD) 13
Italian aircraft 54, 56
Italian L3 light tanks 53
Italian 7th Savari Cavalry 54

Jalo-Kufra road 8
Jalo Oasis 9, 49, 57, 58
Jopling, Tpr 56

Kennedy Shaw, Capt. Bill 14, 16, 16, 18, 19, 31, 34, 43, 44
Kufra Oasis 8, 9, 48

Lawson, Capt. Dick, MC 50, 56, 57, 58
Lazarus, Capt. Ken 12, 13
Leros island 60
Levita island 60
Libyan Arab Force 13, 50
Libyan Desert 4, 10, 15, 30
life on campaign 30–32, 34–36, 38–40, 42
Light Car Patrols (LCPs) 10
Lloyd Owen, Maj. Gen. David 14, 19, 22–23, 23, 47, 60, 62
Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) *see also* Patrols
concept 10–12
disbanded 60
Headquarters (HQ) 8, 9, 11, 12, 17
re-designated from LRP 8, 12
role 12–14
training 14–17
Long Range Patrol (No. 1 Long Range Patrol Unit – LRP) 8, 11, 14, 18

Mahomed Bu Masaud, Tpr 52
'Marble Arch' (Arae Philaenorum) 43, 46
McCoy, Maj. Sam 20, 20
McKay, Pte John 5
Middle East Commandos 13, 14
Mitford, Teddy 18
Montgomery, Gen Bernard 10
Murzuk 8, 54
museums 61–62

National Archives, Kew 61
navigation 16, 16, 34, 38, 40
New Zealand members 18–19, 19
North African theatre of war, 1940–43 7

Olivey Capt. John 43, 50
Operation

Agreement 9
Bigamy 9, 50, 56
Caravan *see* Barce raid
Compass 59
Crusader 9, 54
Nicety 9
Pugilist 60
Torch 9

Owen, Maj. Gen. David Lloyd 14, 19, 22–23, 23, 47, 60, 62

Patch, Gnr James 5
patrolmen 10, 24, 32, 40, 44, 46, 53
Patrols 11, 31, 32, 61
G 8, 18, 50, 54, 56–57
G1 50, 52–53
Guards 14
R 8, 11
S 14, 44
S2 43, 50, 56
Southern Rhodesian 8, 39
T 8, 11, 43, 49, 50, 52
T1 50, 52, 53, 54, 56, 58
T2 60
W 8, 11
Y 22, 34, 58, 59
Y1 23, 42, 57
Yeomanry 5, 8
Peniakoff, Maj. Vladimir 'Popski' 50, 52, 56
Popski's Private Army 14

Powell, Capt. Enoch 46
Prendergast, Lt-Gen. Guy 8, 20, 22, 22, 32, 44, 44, 56

raids ('beat-ups') 14, 54, 59–60 *see also* Barce raid
recruitment 18–20
'road watch' 9, 12, 42–44, 44, 46–49
Rommel, Gen. Erwin 8, 9, 46, 49

sand dunes, negotiating 36
sandstorms 31
SAS (Special Air Service) 9, 14, 49, 54, 60, 61
L Detachment 14
Senussi tribesmen 50, 52
Shaw, Capt. Bill Kennedy 14, 16, 16, 18, 19, 31, 34, 43, 44
signallers 16–17, 40
Sitre 9
Siwa Oasis 9, 59
Cleopatra's Pool 22
special forces, close partnership with 13, 14
Springford, LCpl Brian 5
Stirling, David 14
Sudan Defence Force 8, 49
survey section 12, 13

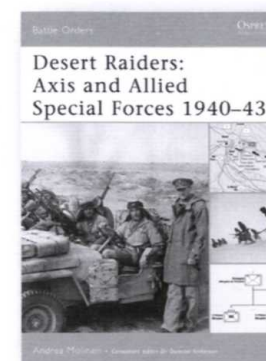
Tamet 9
tanks, Italian L3 light 53
Thompson, Julian 61
Tighe, Craftsman Alf, MM 5
Timpson, Capt. Alastair 50
Tinkler, Tpr Kenneth 5
Tobruk 49, 57
training 14–17
transportation of special units 13
Tripoli 8, 42
Tripolitania 47, 54
Tunisia 9

ULTRA code decrypts 49, 59

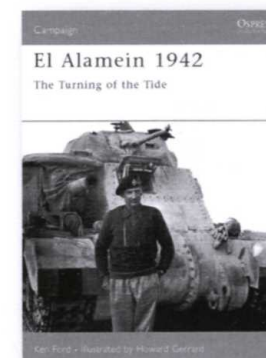
vehicles 10, 18, 27–28, 30, 39, 43, 48, 53, 54
camouflage 30, 35, 35
car, Ford 01 V8 pilot 27
cars, 15cwt pilot 11, 26, 34
jeep, Willys MB 5cwt 20, 27, 34, 50
trapped in sand 15, 36, 36, 38, 38
truck, Chevrolet 1311X3 15cwt 27
truck, Chevrolet 30cwt 11, 11, 13, 15, 25, 26, 27, 27–28, 28, 30, 36, 38, 49
1533X2 4x2 28, 32
WB 27
truck, fitters' 34–35
truck, Ford F30 36
truck, Ford F60 CMP 28
truck, Ford 6-ton 28
truck, Mack MR9 28
truck, Mack NR 10-ton 50
truck, Marmon Herrington 6x6 heavy 28
truck, White 6x4 10-ton 28
truck, wireless 17, 34, 40, 42
Via Balbia 12, 42, 43, 44

WACO aircraft 32
Wann, Guardsman Thomas 50
War Office 8, 16, 60
Wavell, Gen. Sir Archibald 6, 10, 11
weapons 25–26, 28
anti-tank gun, Bofors 37mm 11, 26, 26, 28
anti-tank rifle, Boys .55-cal. 11, 26, 28, 53
captured 26, 26, 54
grenade, No. 36 'Mills Bomb' 25, 28
machine gun, Bren light 26
machine gun, Browning HB .50-cal. 26, 28
machine gun, Lewis Mk 1: 11, 26, 28, 53
machine gun, Vickers .303 medium 26, 28
machine gun, Vickers .5-cal. 28
machine gun, Vickers K light 26, 28, 53
mortars 28
revolvers, .38-cal. 28
rifle, SMLE .303-cal. 25, 28
sub-machine gun, Thompson M1928 .45-cal. 25, 28
Wilder, Capt. Nick, DSO 50, 53, 56, 58
Wynter, Brig. H. W. 61–62

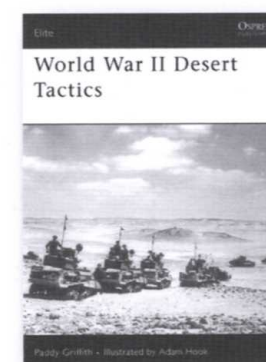
RELATED TITLES



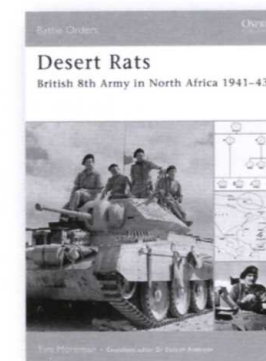
BTO 023 • 978 1 84603 006 2



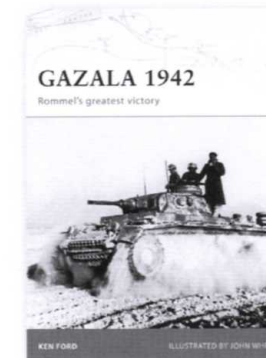
CAM 158 • 978 1 84176 867 0



ELI 162 • 978 1 84603 290 5



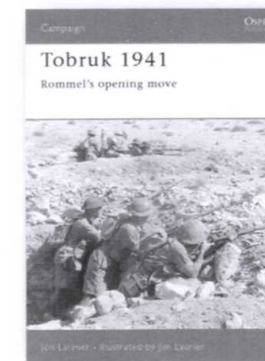
BTO 028 • 978 1 84603 144 1



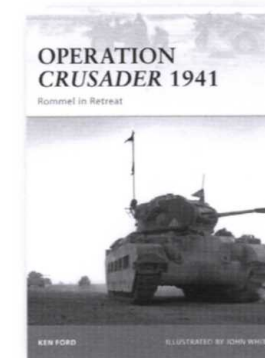
CAM 196 • 978 1 84603 264 6



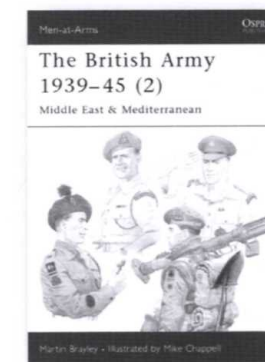
MAA 116 • 978 0 85045 396 6



CAM 080 • 978 1 84176 092 6



CAM 220 • 978 1 84603 500 5



MAA 368 • 978 1 84176 237 1

VISIT THE OSPREY WEBSITE

Information about forthcoming books • Author information • Read extracts and see sample pages

• Sign up for our free newsletters • Competitions and prizes • Osprey blog

www.ospreypublishing.com

To order any of these titles, or for more information on Osprey Publishing, contact:

North America: uscustomerservice@ospreypublishing.com

UK & Rest of World: customerservice@ospreypublishing.com



Insights into the daily lives of history's fighting men and women, past and present, detailing their motivation, training, tactics, weaponry and experiences

LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP PATROLMAN

The Western Desert 1940–43

One of the most celebrated units of the Desert War, the Long Range Desert Group was tasked with strategic reconnaissance and raiding operations deep inside the enemy-held deserts of North Africa. Unlike conventional forces, tied to the coastal plateau by logistical requirements, its patrols ranged across vast expanses of unexplored desert to the south, penetrating deep into hostile territory. This is a detailed study of the life of an LRDG patrolman, including a look at the hardships of life in the desert and the ways in which these men overcame both their environment and their enemy.

Colour artwork ■ Photographs ■ Unrivalled detail ■ Clothing and equipment

US \$18.95 / UK £11.99 / CAN \$22.00

ISBN 978-1-84603-924-9

OSPREY
PUBLISHING



WWW.OSPREYPUBLISHING.COM